# WHAT'S THE WORLD COMING TO?

RUPERT HUGHES

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# WHAT'S THE WORLD COMING TO?

Books by

RUPERT HUGHES

WHAT'S THE WORLD COMING TO?
THE CUP OF FURY
CLIPPED WINGS
EMPTY POCKETS
THE FAIRY DETECTIVE
IN A LITTLE TOWN
THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER
LONG EVER AGO
THE OLD NEST
THE THIRTEENTH COMMANDMENT
THE UNPARDONABLE SIN
WE CAN'T HAVE EVERYTHING
WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY?

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SHE NOTED HOW BROWNER AND BIGGER HE WAS.
SHE WAS AFRAID OF HIM!

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by

RUPERT HUGHES

*Author of*

"WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY?" "THE UNPARDONABLE SIN"
"THE CUP OF FURY," "THE THIRTEENTH COMMANDMENT" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANK SNAPP

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WHAT'S THE WORLD COMING TO?

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# Book I
# MONEY COMES IN

# WHAT'S THE WORLD COMING TO?

## CHAPTER I

OF the two young and exceedingly 1919 women seated in the Plaza Hotel at luncheon, only one realized that she had too much money. She was suffering from a sudden rush of wealth to the bank-account, and it made her head swim. Later she would declare that she had not half enough. This also happens with drink—or used to.

It is the curse of money, as of other intoxicants, that no one ever gets just exactly enough. Both wealth and drink were therefore abolished by law in certain parts of the world in the mirable year that followed the horrible years of the War of Wars. Russia made wealth a crime; and America, liquor.

April Summerlin was the too-rich girl's rather too-pink label. Her mother had named her after the month that brought her to earth. In due time Mrs. Summerlin found occasion to say that "July Fourth" would have been a more prophetic title for her highly inflammable child—especially in view of her precocious engagements to—and with—the lad on the neighboring plantation.

Robert Taxter's name gave no indication of his character except to those peculiar people who believe that the number of letters in one's name has a vital influence on his character and career.

Bob Taxter was a fire-eating Southron, a fire-breather, and a fire-fighter. April had also great talents for spontaneous combustion.

At the age of three Bob and April began their harrowing

alternation of kiss-and-make-up and scrap-and-break-up. At five they announced their engagement to the delighted guests at a children's picnic. Before the picnic was half over they had fought and scratched and become reconciled. They went home parted forever—and were re-engaged next day at Sunday-school.

From then on, that part of Virginia in which the Taxters and Summerlins were important was kept in a state of delicious uncertainty as to whether or not it were safe to mention Bob to April or April to Bob, or unsafe not to.

The worst of it was their intense incandescence in either love or hate. When it was love, there was no sacrifice too great for either to make for the other; when it was hate, there was no sacrifice too great for either to make of the other. Both always rushed at once into violent affairs with alien beings, flaunting the new sweetheart like a red rag—"just to show a certain person that (s)he is not the only person in the world." Later they dropped the poor red rags in the dust "just to show a certain person that (s)he is the only person in the world." This was pretty rough on the poor red rags, but true love is ruthless.

By and by the placid community accepted the affair as an institution like electricity with its positive and negative attractions and repulsions—a sort of make-and-break combination.

Bob went to the Virginia Military Institute and was graduated thence. April went to the Foxcroft School at Middleburg, and after that to New York, where at the Art Students' League she dabbled in ambition and oily clay.

The correspondence of Bob and April was enlivened by a vivacious alternation between love-letters and hate-letters, with occasional coincidences in which each received from the other a letter of groveling apology and self-denunciation.

Then the war came and parted them in earnest, giving all their quarrels a nursery appearance. Bob got abroad in the aviation corps. April could not manage it in any corps, largely because a great man who had once loved her mother was in the State Department somewhere and saw to it, by prearrangement with Mrs. Summerlin, that all of Miss Summerlin's frantic demands for a passport were mysteri-

ously denied. When April went to him, he promised to use his influence, but always reported immovable opposition somewhere. So home she stayed, concealing a broken heart and a decidedly unbroken body in the swagger blouse, skirt, and breeches of the Women's Motor Corps.

Two-thirds of the Regular Army officers stayed at home, too, and countless impatient warriors gnawed their own bitter hearts in helpless shame, but none of them was bitterer than April. Like them, she did the next best thing at hand.

She had been running ambulances and trucks and touring-cars about New York for a year or more, and had advanced from private to sergeant, carrying all sorts of military freight to all sorts of destinations.

Now she faced the future with anxiety. The war was all over but the finals. She would have to return to cits—longer skirts, conventionalities, escorts, and so forth. Bob was not back from France and might have been dead for months, for all she knew—the reports of casualties were hopelessly delayed and confused, and even the listed dead were constantly turning up alive.

To add to her confusion, a neglected elderly relative up and died, and his will exploded like a hand-grenade, scattering gold fragments among unsuspecting relatives.

It was this disaster that April was bemoaning in the Plaza Hotel in her first realization of the dismal fact that money is always in a state of paucity or nimiety. She was telling her troubles across a gaudy Spanish omelet to a very smart young woman, Claudia Reece, who lent a sympathetic ear without understanding in the least why April should be so despondent over her escape from financial mediocrity.

The cruelty of the new money was that April feared its effect on her old love-affair. That off-again-on-again engagement with Bob was threatened at last by something more dangerous than the fact that Bob or April had danced once too often with another girl or man, or had said something better left unsaid or failed to say something better not left unsaid, or had done any one of the infinite infinitesimals that stir love to anger.

Claudia, born a New-Yorker, had never known anything but wealth and had become inured to it. She had met

April when they were pupils together at Foxcroft. They had ridden to the hounds together with the Middleburg Hounds and had been in turn mistress of the beagles. They could follow a rabbit on foot for miles, and could run a young man to death fox-trotting for hours.

Claudia had exerted a pull and got abroad. But in Paris she had tried to console both a lonely major-general and a minor liaison-officer and had sassed a very important person who warned her. So she had been sent home. Claudia would sass anybody. She will doubtless sass St. Peter if he asks her to throw away her cigarette before she steps Inside.

She returned to humble canteen work, washing dishes and dealing out pie, coffee, and hash to rough-neck soldiers. She worked harder than a waitress at Childs', but she lunched at the Plaza. Now she and Sergeant April Summerlin were taking their ease and betraying a boyish pride in smoking cigarettes publicly, between courses. They made a comical-pathetical effort to pretend they felt no bravado in this achievement, though they could see that several old-fashioned persons in the huge room were fluttered by the brazen immorality and unwomanliness of it. A few years before, the same dear old souls would have protested to the waiter if a man had dared to light a cigar in their environs. Now they could only moan: "What's the world coming to? And they look like nice girls, too!"

One of the things America was soon coming to was a crusade against tobacco of every sort for everybody. A lady would nominate herself for the Presidency of the United States on a one-plank platform of tobacco abolition. In England a clergyman at the Temple would be asking whether it would not be advisable to permit men—and women!—to smoke in church cigars, pipes, or cigarettes!

The Church was wondering what the world was coming to and what itself was coming to. One thing the Church was not coming to was an agreement—except upon one thing: that people were not coming to church.

Some of the churchmen credited the war with a great religious awakening, some with a great religious coma. Some said, "Millions of people are going to the movies of Sunday nights; let's stop the movies, so that the audiences will have

to come to church." Others said, "Let's bring the movies to the church, and then the public will want to come to church." The great movie master David Wark Griffith was invited to speak to the Methodist Convention on the subject.

The worst of the religious problem was its contradictions. Nobody could deny that people had never been braver, more generous, more unselfish, more untiring. But the fear of God seemed to have gone out of the world with the fears of hell, death, dirt, and indiscretion. The nicest people had moved about in mud and filth and looked with indifference on heaps of putrefying dead.

Hades had come above ground; yet people flocked into it like tourists—men, women, and children by the million had crowded into the torment, unafraid, enduring all the things the medieval terrorists put into hell to Gehennize people into being good. And yet people went on being just as good and just as bad, as witty or morose, as gentle and as cruel, as before.

For ten thousand years the same patterns had been visible throughout human history for whoso cared to read. Some people had been very bad at times, and some very good at times; some nations had had streaks of nobility and then streaks of ferocity; some cycles had been glorious and some shameful. But nobody and no nation and no period had ever failed to ride the seesaw.

Yet some dear souls persist in thinking that what they call right and truth will some day permanently disestablish what they call wrong and error. They could have seen their prototypes making the same beautiful fools of themselves in the market-places of Assyria—if they could have looked so far back.

They loudly proclaimed now that there must be no more war, that mankind must bind itself together in an indissoluble league of virtue and altruism. They disproved their own sweet dreams by the cruelty of their slanders against the unbelievers and the hangers-back from their folly. With "Love!" on their banner, they hated all the incredulous, and trampled them under with the ferocity of all crusaders.

In the meanwhile 1919 found the world with twenty-three wars in full blast, with every nation distrusting every other,

and with superstitions of the most primeval sort raging in all circles. Scientists and peers published solemnly their communications with the dead; a preacher in New York cured the sick by the laying on of hands, or said so, at least; and all things were as they were in the beginning and apparently ever shall be, world without end, alas!

## CHAPTER II

THOSE who came out of the Inferno of 1914–18 seemed to have lost the fear of everything else as well as of death. Women went everywhere dressed in men's clothes or in shameless silks. Ladies and their young daughters wandered into battle or into crowded dance-halls with total strangers in the utmost promiscuity. In France, American girls formed "flying squadrons," pledged to dance with any soldier that asked them to. Women seemed to claim all the privileges of men, including heroism, martyrdom, self-sufficiency, hard labor, tobacco, profanity, infidelity, politics, finance, administration, military commissions, crosses of war, wounds, disobedience of parents, scorn of conventions—what not?

April and Claudia, who "looked like nice girls, too," were nice girls as girls go. And girls were going pretty fast in 1918 and 1919. The war had turned them out-of-doors and sent them whirling at such a pace that no one could foretell just where they would fetch up.

The window beside these two nice girls looked out on the open square that gave the hotel its name. The little green oasis of former years had been recently and dubiously improved by a fussy clutter of columns, urns, benches, barriers, and platforms, replacing the precious napkin of grass with more of the too-much stone. The hub of this esplanade, if "esplanade" is the word, was the broad bowl of the Fountain of Abundance, set there as a reminder of the strenuous journalist Joseph Pulitzer.

The unhappy architecture was redeemed by the statue that surmounted it all, a modern statue, yet of supreme and classic grace, the lithe figure of a beautiful lady chastely naked and stately, holding against her marble left hip a basket of marble fruit. The girls idly discussed the figure. Claudia said:

"You've been studying sculpture, April. What do you

think of that shameless hussy out there? Is she any good? Who did her?"

"I don't know who the sculptor is, but I think the girl is beautiful. As statuary it's right nice."

The impersonal note suggested the personal, and Claudia asked:

"What's going to become of your ambitions, now that you've got all this money?"

"I don't know," April sighed. "I've had only one ambition for a year, and that was to get across. And I didn't, damn it! Any other ambition seems to be babyish. We've just taken one of those expensive duplex studios, but I don't seem to want to work any more. And then Bob will be a problem—if he comes back. He always hated my ambition. It shocked him to have me studying nudes."

Claudia smiled: "His stay in France may educate him a little."

"It may educate him too much."

"He got part of the Chatterson money, too, didn't he?"

"Yes, but only a little. That's another thing that's keeping me awake nights. Bob and I were poor Virginians together, getting along beautifully except for an occasional spat; and then Uncle Randolph Chatterson had to go and die and leave mamma and me over a hundred thousand dollars and poor Bob only ten. Bob's so proud—I don't know what he'll do.

"I wrote him all about it—didn't dare trust the letter to the mails; they never get them; I met a fellow who was going over for the 'Y.' He promised to hunt Bob up. I wonder how he'll take the news—if he ever gets it.

"It simply defeats me. I never knew money was such a nuisance. Besides, mamma and I have been simply pestered to death by people telling us how to invest it, and all I can find out is that any investment that's safe doesn't produce anything at all, and anything that promises anything risks the whole amount. Mamma is simply unspeakable, and unspeak-to-able. I wonder who did that statue? It's really perfectly darn splendid. If it had a Greek name, we'd be raving over it, I reckon."

They would have been raving over it in another sense if

they had known that its maker had worn an Austrian name.[1] Karl Bitter had tried to live down his Viennese birth and education by sailing to America in his twenty-second year and becoming an American citizen. This statue of his had been finished in innocence of the war and set up during the first year of it.

The sculptor had died, not knowing that his adopted country would enter the lists and help to wipe the very name of the Austrian Empire from the map it had troubled for so many centuries. But people almost never know the names of sculptors, and this statue was therefore almost anonymous. It seemed to be an unconscious prayer for immortality; and if to labor is to pray, so to be beautiful is to pray.

The nymph's suavity of proportion and her rhythm of line are quite miraculous, but the triumph of her creator is in the lissome attitude; for it is the special art of the sculptor to take advantage of every human plane, exploit every contour, and give each articulation its felicitous expression, turning every member at every joint in a new direction, so that the body may revel in all its privileges of motion or of gracefully distributed repose.

Never was there a statue, surely, in which, without affectation or extravagance of posture, the sculptor has been inspired to contrive a torsion so versatile yet so calm. She stands there delicately convolved upon the axis of herself, enwrapped spirally, lily-wise, in her own loveliness; her flesh a temple of reverie, of love, of all the beatific moods in the sweet sufficiency of being exquisitely alive.

But since New York is always building and never built, it was inevitable that this accomplished dream should be confronted by something incomplete.

The nymph of plenty faced now a big shed housing the machineries with which engineers were driving a subway beneath Fifty-ninth Street to link two uptown tunnels.

This shed held temporarily—a very protracted temporarily—the room once occupied, and some day to be reoccupied, by Saint-Gaudens's majestic statue of a gilded General Sherman seated on a gilded charger led forward by a gilded Victory bearing a gilded palm branch—what Henry James called the "golden elegance," the "dauntless

refinement" that "amuses itself with being as extravagantly 'intellectual' as it likes."

The old hero of the March to the Sea, whose aphorism, "War is hell," had been rendered trivial by the four years of carnage in Europe, had been dragged backward up Fifth Avenue before the nymph was established in her place. He was still in retreat under the trees, waiting his day to return to his post.

The girls of his day would have stared in equal wonder at the lofty, unashamed, unclothed nymph and at the 1919 girls. Yet the girls of 1861–65 accomplished their equal quota of evil.

Claudia wore no crinolines, and her corsets were negligible, and her close skirts, gathered under her, ended at her knees; but April's garb was even more fashionable, for she wore short, buttoned skirts making no secret of the breeches beneath—also puttees and a very masculine belted coat and a sort of overseas cap.

The table-cloth concealed her legs, which need not have feared compare with the nymph's outside, but the masculinity of her attire was betrayed above by the flaring lapels, the collar and neck-scarf, and by the cap she kept on her head. There is nothing more feminine than what is known as mannish, as there is nothing less womanly than what is called effeminate.

It would have been hard to say which was the more feminine of the two girls. The words "he," "him," and "his" shuttled through their conversation, as is to be expected wherever two or three women are gathered together. They were talking of their lovers and loveds, of which each had several, as is becoming to young women of their age and charm, and at a time when men in millions were agonizing on the brink of death far from their homes.

Like a very lay Sister of Charity, Claudia had gone about distributing kisses and endearments, and even engagements, to as many heroes as she had time for. It was mighty generous of her, and she did the suffering youth a power of good. Some of these zealous red-rose nurses gave many a young hero more comfort and courage than any of the orators or surgeons, by the simple old device of massaging atrophied souls and bandaging lonely hearts. Claudia granted the

THE NYMPH ALONE WAS UNPERTURBED

delicious privilege of being her fiancé to at least three handsome officers who never lived to come back and discover her amiable perfidy. But Claudia did not boast of this liberality.

April had done a bit of consoling on her own—before Bob left America. In one of their quarrels she had taken up with a fierce young major who almost got her married to him before she knew it. She sent Bob a telegram of notification, and he pleaded for leave of absence on the ground that his mother was ill, and came up from Texas, where he was flying, just in time to stop the wedding. He tried to get April to marry him for safe-keeping, and they were actually on their way to the Municipal Building for a license when he said some wrong thing, and she got off at the next Subway station and went back to her garage. By the time Bob had found her and appeased her the license bureau was closed and he had to take his train back to Texas. He went to France on good terms with her, and she had kept her troth since—pretty well.

The rest of the company in the Plaza dining-room to-day was grave enough, for the times were grave. A number of the men at table were foreign.

There was a convention in the hotel that day, representing small oppressed peoples who had suddenly wakened to a new hope and a keener sense of racial unity: Poles, Czechs, Albanians, Unredeemed Greeks, Zionists, Ukrainians, Slovenes, Uhro-Ruhsins. Professor Masaryk was there and Roman Dmowski and Captain Stoica and Mr. Ben-Avi. Their ambitions conflicted with one another in many a detail. The Poles had withdrawn from the mid-European Union, and the Jugo-Slavs would follow, but they all hoped to remodel the map of Europe so that no race should be oppressed by another. Their boundaries, their statistics, and their sacred claims were in hopeless confusion, but—

Suddenly April exclaimed: "Look! Out there in the fountain!"

The Plaza, almost empty at her latest glance, was now suddenly peopled with a boiling mob. In the bowl of the fountain stood a foreign-looking man with his arm about the nymph, who alone was unperturbed. The man was not embracing her as Praxiteles's Venus of Knidos had been

lovingly entreated long ago. He was using her for support, oblivious of her graces.

Everybody in the Plaza was keenly excited. A surf of cheers began and persisted. Automobiles checked by the crowd accumulated, and their drivers began to honk their horns.

## CHAPTER III

THE tumult invaded the dining-room, where silence was a religion. It seemed to seep through the tall windows and fume through the corridor doors. The waiters, hurrying in with their dishes, carried as upon salvers the most glorious tidings. They bent and whispered to their clients. April's waiter had gone for artichokes. He came back with the marvelous words:

"The armisteets is signed, mees. The war is over, mees, eef you pleass."

This was unbelievably beautiful, after four years of increasing ravage. Peace struck the world as with a lightning and rain on a suffocating midnight. Thunders of love, mellow and sonorous, rolled round the globe.

Later the rumor would be called "the false armistice." But even false news was welcome when it was so good. And besides, everybody knew that peace was imminent, and hearts were ready for the first pretext to cast off a universal mourning so prolonged and so profound that its horror was only understood when it was at end.

Tears gushed from April's eyes and from Claudia's. Their hearts broke with very bliss.

When peace came finally, everybody would find that it brought no millennium. The nations had been held together in a kind of close and wonderful unity by the iron hoops of war. Now that the hoops were struck off, they would break apart like barrels sent rolling downhill, and evils forgotten and rotten would spill out to offend the feet and the nostrils. Souls would be sent flying in all directions, and a hopeless task would confront assiduous persons who would try to gather them together into a great new tun to be called the League of Nations.

But these and many other bitter truths were for the morrow's supply. The garbage of history was not yet dis-

closed. The wedding-feast was served, and the whole world invited to celebrate the salvation of millions of lives—temporarily; for, after all, though people forgot it for the nonce, everybody would go right on dying, and many who might have perished in splendid instants would be saved for sickening conclusions of slow torment or disgrace; many, indeed, would be killed by accidents and in street fights who might have survived the barrages of shell and lived long.

April did not look too far ahead, being wise. The rescue of the countless hosts meant chiefly to her the rescue of her one man. She gasped:

"Oh, now Bob won't have to die!"

Claudia thought of her three betrotheds. She had not focused her eyes as yet on one object. They filled with tears, and she sobbed:

"And neither will Phil—and Jack—and Harry."

The girls' hands ran to each other across the table-cloth and clenched. They had lived to witness a universal reprieve, the world's release from damnation. April said, with sublime simplicity:

"I couldn't eat any more lunch, to save me—not now!"

"Me, neither," said Claudia.

It seemed a pity to waste those artichokes, huge green boiled roses with a golden sauce at hand. But some tribute had to be paid to the noble occasion. The girls felt that it would be unpoetic to eat.

When people would rejoice, they feel that they must squander something. So the world proceeded to play the sailor ashore after a long, rough voyage. Nearly everybody got drunk on one beverage or another. Ice-water proved as intoxicating as gin. The open air, the ferment of rejoicing mobs, the noise of cheers, the uproar of motor-horns, the mere commotion of throngs in restless movement—everything and everybody seemed inebriated and inebriating. Everybody went everywhere just to look at everybody else.

April and Claudia made only a brief quarrel over the paying of the bill for the lunch. April won and gave the waiter a quarter above the appropriate tip, so that he would remember the big day. In the lobby they bought news-

APRIL'S WAITER CAME BACK WITH MARVELOUS WORDS

papers. In the streets newsboys scudded like hornets blown about by a great wind. The boys could hardly afford to stop to collect the fares for their papers. Men and women snatched at sheets and paid the first coin they found, without troubling about change.

When the girls pushed through the agitation in the lobby, they found the Plaza outside a mass of clotted humanity. Motor-cars moved like molasses. The bowl of the Fountain of Abundance was as crowded as a six-o'clock street-car with "standees."

April and Claudia submerged themselves in the mass, two atoms making one molecule in the body politic. There was a kind of pantheism about it. They wanted to be "in tune with the Infinite," at one with the One, and all that sort of thing.

In the jostling, squeezing, crushing stream they laughed with cosmic laughter. Familiarities that would have been horrifying in old friends were forgiven to passing strangers. This was the democracy of the Saturnalia. Womankind, having claimed and received the privilege of voting and working in equality with men, felt obliged to share the holiday and the good-fellowship and turn everything upside down. Sanity was insane on such a day. Dignity was almost obscene.

By some mystic agreement people in all the cities began to do a new thing, to empty waste-baskets of paper from windows, to tear up newspapers, wrapping-paper, any paper, and cast it into the air to serve as confetti. In some of the streets the pavements were ankle-deep in such rubbish. Chicago looked as if a blizzard had enveloped it.

April and Claudia trudged down Fifth Avenue, giggling, hurrahing, shrieking with the shopgirls and the factory-hands from the abandoned trades and industries. They met friends and embraced. Rich, poor, middlings, soldiers, sailors, marines, anarchists, capitalists mingled. Strange creatures came forth as from dens, crazy-looking people, fanatics of all sorts, in wild garbs.

It took an hour to creep from Fifty-ninth Street to Forty-second. Here the mob was too dense to penetrate. The girls turned west on Forty-third to Sixth Avenue and down to Forty-second and so westered to Times Square. Here was

another vast quivering jelly of men, women, street-cars, taxicabs, trucks, limousines, delivery wagons.

High above this coagulation, in a balcony of the Knickerbocker Hotel, stood the great Caruso, scattering roses upon the air as fast as they could be passed to him. And now and then he squandered a few still more precious notes of peerless song. That was his way of playing the spendthrift.

April and Claudia tried to slide into the hotel to telephone to their homes that they were alive and happy. When at last they had oozed to the booths, service was refused them. Most of the telephone force was on a joy-strike, too, and only messages of vital importance were accepted by the faithful remnant.

April and Claudia went back to the chaos. Their clasped hands were torn apart in the backwash from a rush of singing soldiers splitting the crowds regardless. The girls could not rediscover each other.

April set out for home, up Broadway. Time and again the breath was pressed out of her. Time and again her soft body was ground between the bodies of rough men as between the cylinders of a clothes-wringer. She wondered that she was not flattened out permanently.

Many times she gasped with pain or squealed in a fear of swooning. Once a big soldier braced himself against his neighbors and forced a little space for her between his arms. Noting her mannish clothes, he laughed, "Come along, brother."

As April thanked him and slipped through, he collected the toll of a quick kiss. She would have struck him in her rage, but she could not get her hands up, and she could only waste a glare on his downward grin.

She reached her home at last, and the hall-man's first glance gave him a suspicion that she had celebrated with more zeal than discretion. She had to wait for the elevator, and when it arrived it brought down an elderly negro with a complicated apparatus for vacuum-cleaning. The darky elevator-boy had an intuition that he ought to explain the situation to a Southern lady kept waiting to step into a car occupied by a negro passenger.

"Shame to keep you waitin', Miss Summalin, but freight-elevata-boy run off this aftanewn to jine the celibation. I

nachally had to bring Pafessa Taxta daown in this yeah caw."

April was startled at hearing Bob's name applied to so unlike a person. Professor Taxter was having trouble with the squirming hose and the long nozle of his contraption, and he gave a burlesque of Laocoön and his serpents until April, with a sudden tenderness for an aged negro, lent a hand to extricate him.

The old man's slave psychology was horrified at putting a lady of evident quality to the trouble of saving his worthless life. His face glowed with a charcoal blush, and he wiped his hat off his mossy poll to mingle apologies with thanks.

"Ah'm sah-y to desecrate yo' convenience, missy; but Ah'll be out yo' way in one little minute."

"All right, Uncle," said April, with the smile one grants a stray hound.

The word "Uncle" seemed to delight the old man. His eyelids shivered and his eyeballs rolled white. His fat mouth seemed to quiver, too, for words. But they did not come—only a chuckle like the *glug* of liquid from a bottle sounded in his throat. He was still glugging when April stepped into the elevator, and his eyes followed her up as if she were an angel in translation. April said to the boy:

"Did you call that old nigro 'Taxter'?"

"Yassum."

"Who is he? What does he do?"

"He's a pafessa of vacuam-cleanin', ma'am. He's been wukkin' along this street for a yeah or tew. Yassum. If you-all was to want any vacuam-cleanin' did, he'd be glad to git it to dew."

"We might. I'll let you know."

"If you forgit his name—"

"I won't," laughed April.

She was likely to forget the name of Taxter! She was still laughing at the contrast between the winged Apollo she had been thinking of so ardently all afternoon and the stumblesome old black dotard who wore the same name.

If any one had told her that the day would come when the shuffling dodderer would wind the cloud-piercing youth in the coils of his hose and thwart him for his own good with

a tyrannic benevolence, April would have mocked at the fantastic conceit. But since the mouse terrifies the elephant in fact, and in fable releases the lion, why might not the clumsy buzzard gain sway over the battle-falcon that wheeled in air above the reach of cannon?

Without quite knowing it, Professor Taxter was hunting for Bob, and his conquest over him would be more lasting than that of the German airmen who had that very day flung Bob out of the sky in a desperate battle.

## CHAPTER IV

WHEN April reached her own apartment and set her latchkey to the lock, the door opened before she could turn the key, and she was confronted by a withered little negress bound in a hide like a worn russet shoe.

"Hello, Pansy!" said April.

"Hello?" Pansy scolded. "It's hah tahm you was helloin'! Yo' po' maw and me just abote gin you up for daid. Whah you been at, all this livelong day? Gittin' yo'se'f killed or sumpin' in dat old amb'lansh?"

"No. I've been celebrating the end of the war."

"Eend of de waw? Is dis yeah ol' waw done come to its senses? It's hah tahm, says I, hah tahm!"

April strode past, tossing her cap on the console and walking into a great room as tall as a chapel, with a little gallery at one end.

"Hello, Mummsy!" she said, going to the desk where her mother sat immersed in heaps of letters.

"Hello, honey! What kept you so late?"

"Haven't you been out to see?"

"No, I've sat here toiling over these awful letters all aftanewn. I'm almost distracted trying to select a place to put our hateful money. I almost wish we'd never heard of it."

April kissed her, back of the ear among the little white curls that clustered there, and wrapped warm arms about her, and spoke in a voice whose strong Virginianity had been a little modified by her New York experience.

"Forget the old money for a while, Mummsy. On a day like this you oughtn't to think of money."

"What day is to-day? It isn't Sunday, I know."

"It's the Sabbath of the world. The war is over!"

"No!"

"Yes!"

Mrs. Summerlin's little body ached from the thumping of her big heart. She had been a wee girl when Lee surren-

dered to Grant at Appomattox, not far from her own obliterated home, and she had been glad even then of peace, even of such a peace as the shattered South received with its Lost Cause. But this peace meant Victory as well as the cessation of destruction; and the bravery that had sustained her through the danger abandoned her, now that the danger was over. She wept bountifully in the arms of the strong young daughter in the mannish clothes. April was amazed that the news had not yet reached this calm lagoon.

While she patted her mother's back as one comforts a weeping child, she saw across one shaken shoulder in a corner a group of her efforts at sculpture, finished studies that had been cast in plaster; lumps of plasticene, neglected tools, and one ambitious clay bust that had been left unwatered till it dried and cracked hideously.

April had been willing to sacrifice her art for her country and for the privilege of being a military chauffeuse running errands of all kinds about town. But now, all of a sudden, Desdemona's occupation was gone. Her sculpture beckoned to her again. Pondering her figurines studied from living models unclothed, she remembered Bob's inability to see anything but shocking indecency in them.

She had taken up art as an escape from what she called poverty and idleness. She had heard of sculptresses who earned munificent sums for portraits, fountains, and other odd jobs. The poverty was ended, but the idleness confronted her. Art was a nice business for a woman, and while April was proud to sacrifice it for war, she wondered if she ought to sacrifice it for the whim of one narrow-minded lover. Now that Bob was to escape from the war alive, he had become unsanctified. A hero demobilized is a particularly plain citizen.

Her mother was evidently musing on Bob, too, for suddenly she stopped crying and began to laugh hysterically.

"This means that Bob will come home! Isn't it Heaven's own mercy!" She paused, having learned that Heaven's own mercy was uncertain. "Unless he's been shot down by some of those beasts. He might have been killed a month ago and we'd not hear. But if Bob comes back, everything will be perfect, won't it?"

April groaned, "Oh yes, yes!" But she wondered.

The next morning's papers unanimously announced that the armistice had not been signed, and denounced the news agency that had published what it had received as authoritative gospel.

The official word of the armistice reached America at midnight of the third day. April was wakened at dawn by the noise of whistles and sirens from the Hudson River. Her drowsy eyes saw paper already falling through the air from windows above. The revel had begun anew. It raged all day and all night with greater intensity than before.

When April had dressed and compelled the grumbling Pansy to give her an early breakfast, she read in the morning paper that the war was officially dead. She telephoned Claudia and found her ready and willing to undertake a new foray. The whole populace was once more pouring into the streets in a panic as if an earthquake threatened to shake the buildings down.

The two girls wandered Fifth Avenue once more, kicking their feet through the clutter of paper with the pleasant rustle of a walk through autumn leaves. The carnival was increasing swiftly in pace and volume, in the overpowering crescendo of a titanic symphony. Many patriots were getting drunk betimes.

A truck-load of soldiers, sailors, and cases of beer rolled up the Avenue. All the young men were at least tipsy already. One of them proffered a bottle to April and shouted at her like a young Gambrinus. He was whisked out of her sight before she could decide whether she ought to be a prude and rebuke him with a snub or be a patriot and a good sport and spend a smile on him. She did not even recognize him as the fellow who had kissed her three days before.

She never quite forgot the incident, because it saddened her to observe the complete slump of all these fearless young zealots into blatant young sots. Later, Joe Yarmy would ride through her life with devastating effect. He would not greet her with good cheer, nor she him. They would meet as instant enemies, but with no memory at all of having ever seen each other on this day; too many soldiers hailed her in passing and Joe Yarmy hailed too many girls in passing for either's face to be impressed upon the other's mind.

Later in the day copious alcohol would so relax Joe's eye muscles that each eye would register its own visions on his sodden brain and he would hail twice as many girls as there really were.

Citizens and barkeepers would treat him all day to all he could drink. All the multitudinous soldiers in town would be subjected to every form of ruinous solicitation. Thousands of them would remember their dignity and their duty to their uniform and be no more hilarious than the revel justified. But hundreds would lapse into blithering stupidity, blind wrath, or idiotic recklessness.

And none lapsed farther than Joe Yarmy. He lapsed so far that his trousers also lapsed, until he lost them altogether in some mysterious manner, and was toted for a block or two, bare-legged and horizontal, by a quartet of reeling marines who had found him playing Noah on a side-street stoop.

April and Claudia narrowly escaped encountering this Bacchic procession as they struggled up Broadway under the escort of Claudia's fourth-best betrothed and her brother Walter, who held April's nigh arm and would have clasped her other if she had not cowed him with her protests.

He was very fond of her and he would have loved her well if she had let him. He was a well-balanced soul, too, and if she could only have loved him, they would have led a well-balanced life.

But Bob Taxter had got her heart in the grip of his fierce hands and he would give it many a squeeze and many a pang.

Perhaps April would have been more amenable to Walter Reece's wooing if she could have seen as far as the streets of Paris and the exceedingly unconventional doings and goings-on that were breaking all commandment-breaking records even there. Paris had four hours' start in the hilarity that waits for nightfall, and by the time New York was cranking up Paris was hitting on all twelve cylinders. But April could not see that far, and it was perhaps as well. By midnight she was so footsore, elbow-sore, and joy-fagged that she had to have refreshment.

When Walter and the other man proposed food, they were greeted with cheers. But it was one thing to get hun-

gry and another to get fed. Restaurant after restaurant proved unapproachable. Guests who were in stayed in, and few came out except such as were thrown out for violating even the rules of Saturnals.

Eventually these beggars in velvet found an opening in an Automat restaurant. Even here the raid had been so incessant that most of the boxes were empty and the nickels that were deposited came back with a dismal click.

A cup of coffee apiece and the last run of pie had to suffice the roisterers, and there were not chairs enough for all. Claudia and April sat, and the young men sat on the broad arms of the chairs.

Walter Reece tried to make love to April, but the prune pie and coffee did not help his suit. Yet suddenly April paused with fork uplifted and gasped:

"I wonder where poor Bob is now."

"Well may you wonder," said Claudia, cynically.

April thought of France with anxiety, as girls of other nations do when their men are there. She half wondered if she would rather have Bob dead or disloyal. She shuddered at the alternative, and, raising her coffee-cup, said a prayer in a toast:

"Here's to him, anyhow!"

At that moment poor Bob was not quite dead, nor yet quite alive.

## CHAPTER V

WHEN the news broke that the war of wars was ended, young Bob Taxter wept.

Nearly everybody in the world wept on that day. There was hardly a dialect that was not wrung to eloquence in the universal rapture. But there was only one universal language, and that was the appearance of a solution of sodium chlorid on the eyelids of mankind.

There was every imaginable motive back of those tears. This good soul sobbed out of a holy gratitude that men had ceased at last to slaughter men, in multitudes, day and night, year in, year out. Another cried with joy because a certain soldier was now removed from the menace of death. A third because a certain soldier had not lived until this day. These wept because their long sufferings had ended in triumph; those because, for all their struggles, they were beaten; and some because they had had no chance to fight. Millions of soldiers and sailors, especially in America, had given themselves to months, even to years, of training and sacrifice for a battle that ended before they could come up. And they grieved like children kept home from a promised circus.

The story was told that Marshal Foch, the supreme architect of victory, also wept, and wept because the enemy, so hostile to art in all things, would not wait yet a few days till he could bring off the tremendous climax he had planned for the perfection of his monumental victory. His cathedral must live forever now without its tower and its rose-window.

Young Bob Taxter wept like Foch, because he, too, found himself with an unfinished victory on his hands. In fact, Bob's victory disgustingly resembled a catastrophe.

On that very morning this intrepid Virginian had climbed the sky of France with a small squadron of fellow-falcons to hurry the reeling German lines from defeat to disaster,

from confusion to chaos. The aviators were willing, but their machines had been overworked in the recent sleepless pursuit, and one by one the planes had to go back, leaving Bob and his friend Jimmy Dryden, the ace of aces, to linger for a few final observations and the nice placing of their remaining bombs.

Suddenly out of a baby-pink cloud a quintet of German Fokkers plunged for Bob and Jim. Bob and Jim set out for home with great enthusiasm, at a speed like a mocking laughter.

But Jim's engine began to lag. Bob could have got away easily; but if the idea came to him he cast it overboard and faced death in mid-sky as jauntily as if he were riding a Coney Island roller-coaster for fun. He slowed down to keep Jim company. He turned about and fought the German five, with amazing charges and retreats, swerves, dives, swoops, feints, pretended collapses, and soaring rushes up the blue chute. He exulted in the festival like a seraphic acrobat.

He sent one German, blazing, to grass, and scared another into a colic of engine trouble.

All the while the famous Dryden, infamously humiliated, sweated and cursed and wallowed, trying to keep aloft till he could clear the fighting-line. He would never have made it if Bob had not fenced off the three Germans and diverted them to chasing him. By the time Dryden was safe Bob was miles away from his goal.

He barely escaped destruction by turning a monstrous somersault from the clouds to the treetops; then he ducked under his lowest foe and cut for home.

The Germans, driven back by the French anti-aircraft guns, sent Bob a farewell volley. As luck would have it, and as Bob expressed it, they shot off the seat of his pants. His tailless plane landed ignominiously on its nose in a tiny French hamlet recently evacuated by the pell-mell Huns. Here there was only one other man, an old man with a wooden leg, a wooden head, and not the faintest mental or mechanical equipment for repairing a rudderless airplane with a riddled gasolene-tank.

Bob's first act on reaching *terra firmissima* was to disentangle himself from his wreckage, shake his fist at the dwindling Huns, and waft them a promise to give them hell to-morrow.

The populace of the village came swarming out to him with compliments for his escape, sympathy for his bruises, and the amazing news that the war was over. Bob's French was scanty, but he made out that the *guerre* was *finie*. He was dazed at first; then he dazed the chorus of merry villagers by breaking down and weeping like the cub he was. He had no thought that he had been brave to the uttermost with a celestial valor. He thought that he was disgraced forever and had ended his first and only war with a ridiculous bump. The French peasants had had four years of this glory and had been fed up on what he had just tasted. They thought him even madder than most Americans.

The town's one old man, who had lost a leg in 1870 and had feared that the sacred Revenge would never be achieved, limped out now to confirm the almost incredible fact that the stupendous German dragon was fawning at the feet of the Allies and begging to be allowed to go home without further wounds—contented to return to its land with only its wounds and its debts for its pains.

Bob watched the tearful ecstasies of the peasants for a while and slowly understood a little of what it meant to them. He pocketed his private regret for future consideration, and contented himself with howling after the vanished German planes:

"I'll get you in the next war, you sons of Huns, and I hope it comes soon!"

The Germans could not hear, and the French could not understand these most reprehensible, these infinitely naughty, remarks.

Having cleared his throat of his black prayer, Bob turned with Virginian courtesy to render himself agreeable to his hosts. They plainly wanted to have a celebration, and Bob consented to make one of the two available men.

He found that he had more French than he thought he had, especially as the peasants spoke slowly from limited vocabularies, with plenteous gesticulation, and with no prejudices against pointing, or even shoving.

Several very attractive young women of various weights dragged Bob about, gave and accepted kisses and hugs and shocked nobody—least of all Bob.

It was doubtless the jolt of his fall that sprained his

memory, for Bob quite forgot that he had a perfectly good and beautiful fiancée at home in America, and that he had pledged a thousand guaranties against any nonsense with those terrible French beauties.

April, like the average American, believed that all French women are both wickedly beautiful and beautifully wicked. The sordid truth that the vast majority of them are neither had been made apparent to Bob. But in any case, on this day the whole world, having suspended the horrors of villainy, suspended also the horrors of virtue; and all respectable people misbehaved more or less according to the opportunity and the environment.

Bob's environment was very tame compared to what was going on in Paris, London, New York, Chicago, Berlin, Rome, Watertown, Waterloo, Ogdensburg, Montigny, Marlotte, Castellamare, Uskub, Saloniki, Keokuk, Mount Kisco, Los Angeles, Ladylove, Prsasnysz, Wloszczowa, and where not in the gazetteer from Aaby, Denmark, to Zwanzig, Missouri, and on around to Aaby again.

When Bob fell out of the empyrean into the armistice he selected a hamlet hardly as big as its name, Villeperdue-de-Rouergue. It had been hardly more than a ganglion on one of the poplar-lined nerve-roads. Now the poplars were all splinters, and the ganglion was somewhat scrambled. But the Germans in their haste had neglected the little church completely. It was intact.

The bronze bell had been taken down one night and hidden. It was dug up now by big-thewed peasant girls, who lugged it up to the tower across the roof which almost touched the ground. They hung it in place and set it to yelping.

There was no priest for this church. Even in times of peace a monthly visitor conducted the only services there were, except for an occasional funeral or christening. The big little bell seemed to be glad that it had not been absorbed into a German cannon; it swung its skirts and danced and sang. When the tall girls wearied of ringing it or preferred to go back to earth and swing in a dance with Bob, the children scampered up the church roof and kept the welkin clamorous.

Bob danced and marched. He sang American songs, joined in the "Marseillaise," led "The Star-spangled Ban-

ner," drank wine from many a glass, hugged the old ladies, gave the babies flights in air, and squandered his soul and body in the jubilee. When he fell at last into the bed provided for him he was as empty of every emotion as the drained gasolene-tank of his airship.

The world had grown so used to war as an every-day business that peace seemed incredible. With the fatigue of joy came anxiety. People realized vaguely that peace would propound a throng of riddles, would disorganize every institution. The war, like a suddenly started train, had knocked the peoples off their feet and sent everything away; gradually a kind of order had been established; and now peace, jamming down the brakes, would fling everything about again.

And yet the one sublimely beautiful truth remained, that suddenly people had stopped killing one another. Some sweet souls, who kept their ideals unsullied by fact or experience, declared that this was the end of war, and that men would never fight again, provided certain satisfactory arrangements were made. They would soon set about making those arrangements and would find themselves in considerable embarrassment. But it was enough that for the moment, for the day, this week, for a year, perhaps, people should stop killing one another; that fathers, husbands, sons and brothers and sweethearts would come back to their women and homes be homes once more.

When Bob woke the next morning he learned that the news of peace was officially denied. He was refreshed enough to rejoice in the hope of one more chance at the Boche.

He was in a blaze of ambition for one last grand sky-spree. He needed only an airplane. In the condition of the roads, the shortest way back to the line was *via* Paris. He set out thither on foot, by ox-wagon, ambulance, any vehicle that would advance him on his way. He reached Paris on the third day, just in time for the official news of the armistice. The false rumor had seemed to exhaust the human powers of celebration, but it proved to be only a tame rehearsal.

These pages must remain as blank of those festivities as Bob's memory was the next afternoon when he woke up with

nothing in his head but a torture of pain, mitigated by the feeling that it was cheap at the price and the only proper condition for any self-respecting lover of mankind and peace. His lips had kissed the cheeks of more lasses than he could number, and the brims of far more glasses.

And now that the war was over and the celebration was over he wanted to go home. That was the cry in millions on millions of hearts.

"I want to go home!" A cyclonic nostalgia stormed the world. The Americans overseas were prostrated by it, hysterical with it. The long habit of discipline, the strict shackles of military organization, could hardly keep the soldiers or even the officers in hand. The howl now was for ships to go back on, as the howl had been for ships to get out on.

Bob was supposed to report at once to his superiors. But he met Jimmy Dryden in Paris, and Jimmy hailed him as a ghost. It had been supposed that Bob had perished in his fallen ship. He had been recorded as "missing."

"I couldn't think of calling the record a liar," said Bob. "I'll just stay missing awhile. I don't know when I'll ever see this Paris town again. I'd better have a look at the—er—art-galleries an' everything."

"I'll help you look," said Jimmy. "We'll see if we can't leave a little dent in this fair burg to remember us by."

They saw a good deal of the Everything, but not much of the art-galleries. The trouble with the art-galleries was that they opened so early and closed so early, while Everything opened so late and closed so late. When Bob and Jim rolled into such lodgings as they had found there was some sleeping to do. Getting to bed at five and getting up even so promptly as eight hours later brought breakfast and luncheon into collision.

The streets were full of interesting friends and of strangers willing to be friends, and by the time Bob and Jim reached the Louvre or the Luxembourg or the Panthéon it was always just closing. They found the grim word *Fermé* on all the improving doors, while all the others were hospitably wide.

Besides, one had to step carefully in Paris. The city was infested with military police in American uniforms. They had a most embarrassing habit of stopping officers, even—

officers especially—and demanding a glimpse of passes. Officers who had unfortunately left their passes on the piano were rudely arrested as absent without leave, and shipped back to their units for punishment. There were at least two thousand of these truant heroes loose in Paris.

Bob and Jim marched past the M.P.'s with all the business-like dignity they could muster, trying to look as un-A. W. O. L. as possible. They bluffed it through till one sad night, and then—

It was all the Germans' fault, as usual, for having withdrawn from business so hastily that they left the Allies nobody to fight but one another. The Americans particularly were choked with unexpended energy. They were not satisfied that they had convinced the world, or themselves, of their unequaled prowess. They resented the tardiness of their arrival on the firing-line. Some of the Allies reminded them of it now and then. For their own souls' sakes, and to keep down any temptation toward unseemly pride, they reminded the Americans of the fact that their equipment however magnificent, was still in America for the most part, and that they had fought with borrowed material.

Some American officers made themselves a nuisance in Paris with their belated belligerence. Many Americans high enough up to be aloof from lowlier irritations regretted the swagger of their fellow-countrymen and neglected no device for muffling the screams of the Eagle. The M.P.'s were instructed to enter into any affray where American soldiers were engaged and attack—not the enemy, but the Americans. A great body of them, indeed, was specially drilled in rough-house tactics on a race-track outside Paris for the one purpose of suppressing Americans. This was most depressing strategy, a loathsomely ingenious method of persuading American officers that fighting was out of fashion. It was very tough for the officers, since they were generally handicapped by liquor, while the M.P.'s fought on dry ground. It was poor Bob's misfortune to learn of this new order first, by way of its practical demonstration.

## CHAPTER VI

AFTER a night begun at a *revue*, continued at a *bal*, and finished at a *café*, Monsieur Bob went to his *lit* reasonably *tôt* in the *matin*. He woke somewhat befuddled in the afternoon and found a letter on the floor. He could not imagine how he had received it. His memory had quite lost the fact that a Y. M. C. A. man had met him reeling along the street, recognized him, and given him the letter, explaining that April had asked him to deliver it in person. Bob had thanked him, vainly urged him to have a drink, pocketed the letter and forgotten it. It had fallen out of his coat and stared at him now in white reproach.

Seeing that it was from April, he felt unworthy to open it. He had at least the decency to hunt down the raincoat that served for a bathrobe and gather it about him in a chair before he invaded the envelop.

He kissed the superscription, "*Bob darling!*" with reverent lips and proceeded to read:

BOB DARLING:

Before I tell you how much I love you and miss you and how fearful I am that you may never live to read this, let me tell you the wonderful news. You are now a rich man. Our great-uncle Chatterson died last week and left you ten thousand dollars. The cash is waiting for your return. I wish it were a million, but I reckon you'll be glad enough to get even a mere ten thousand. It would have seemed like all the money in the world, a little while ago, wouldn't it, darling?

Bob emitted a war-whoop and executed a scalp-dance. He had more joy than he could handle. He had to dump part of the burden on somebody else.

He dashed across the hall to Jimmy Dryden's room and found the illustrious ace in a state of sleep as profound as that of Icarus when he landed from the first of all flights. Bob restored him to life with no undue delicacy and suc-

ceeded at last in boring the great news through Dryden's fuddle. Dryden gaped his congratulations and tried to return to his pillow. But Bob was garrulous.

"If you knew what this means to me! Angels must have brought it, for there's no other way I could have got it," he raved. "It's not only the money, though I never expected to have that much in all my days. It's the chance it gives me to marry April. She has always been poor, too—Virginia poor, you know—a big old house, horses, a few hounds, a lot of acres and niggers and all that, but never any cash.

"The poor darling went to New York to try to lift the family out of the rut. She took up sculpture—lots of talent, too—but sculpture's no job for a young girl. I hate it. We had quite a row over it.

"But she took up driving an ambulance when the war broke, and she and her mother have had to skimp more than ever. Now I'm a billionaire, I can start in business right away. We can get married without waiting. She can give up her sculpture and be the lady she is. And we'll live happily ever after. God! ain't it great!"

"Great!" Dryden yawned. "I'll appreciate it more when I've had a couple more winks."

"No, you don't! You come with me while I cable April to start buying her trousseau. I'll buy some of it over here myself. What could I get?"

"Read the rest of the letter. She'll probably tell you what she wants."

"That's a good idea!" said Bob, and dropped into a chair. He reread the golden phrases, chuckling. Then there was a silence that permitted Dryden to do the "falling leaf" through slumberland, till he was awakened by a sepulchral groan from Bob and merciless jabs.

"Listen to this! I'm sunk! Oh, *sacré nom de* pup, what a piker I am! Just listen to this:

"You are not the only lucky one. Our great-uncle left mamma a hundred thousand dollars, and twenty-five thousand more to me. Isn't it astounding? We're all rich! Of course, your ten ought to have been more, but we oughtn't to look these sudden riches in the mouth.

"Rich as I am, I love you more than ever, and pray for your quick return."

Bob's voice sank away. He gnawed his knuckles in chagrin. Dryden was startled surly. He growled: "What the— Why the girlish gloom? You poor nut, you've got ten thousand, and your girl's got a hundred and a quarter. What more do you want?"

Bob moaned: "Can't you see that I'm a goner? This rotten money has separated us forever. She's rich, and I'm a pauper alongside of her."

"That's easy. You've only got to make your money work for you, and you'll have a hundred thou' of your own."

"But what will her money be doing all that time? When I get my measly hundred thou' she'll be a millionairess. No, Jim, I'm gone. I've lost her. Something tells me! I wish I had our great-uncle up in the air ten miles. I'd drop him into the English Channel, him and his damned money with him."

Dryden tried to encourage him, but Bob's soul had turned another of its somersaults. He had shot from the clouds to the hard earth in one fell swoop again.

"Get into your clothes," Bob commanded. "We'll go out and try to drown this gashly sorrow before it kills me."

"We're in time for the Louvre, maybe," Dryden proposed. "A few old masters might cool your blood."

"You know what you can do with the old masters. A few young misses will be more in my line. I'm an outlaw now—thrown out in a cold world. Hurry up and get dressed, if you're coming with me."

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At about two o'clock the following morning Robert and James, the peerless aviators, spiraled into a famous bazaar of wine, woman, song, dance, food, and facile acquaintance. It was packed to suffocation, and it resounded with such a polyglot racket as must have shivered the wine-shop in the basement of the Tower of Babel.

In the words of a favorite A. E. F. poem of that day

> "With vin blanc a snootful it's hard to be neutral
> In the famous Battle of Paris."

Bob and Jim were in an exigent humor, and, finding no

other place to sit, invited themselves to squeeze in with a group of blear-eyed officers of all nations surrounding one bright-eyed charmer whose beauty was as cosmopolitan as her tastes. This highly illumined young woman greeted Bob and Jim with shrill welcome and acclaimed *les Yankees* as the saviors of the whole world. Bob and Jim accepted the tribute as a self-evident platitude, but the other citizens of the world demurred.

The Frenchman asked them what nation had made the machines they flew in.

The Britisher asked them what nation had made the ships that brought them over.

Jim, with fine deference, confessed that they owed the use of wind and water to France and England. But Bob growled:

"You were mighty glad to furnish the transportation!"

A wrangle ensued in which an inflamed Belgian reminded them that if Belgium had not laid herself down in front of the Germans and held them for a few days, the French could never have stopped them.

The Frenchman cried, "Ah, but we stopped zem—and holded zem!" An Italian laughed, and reminded all France that Italy had saved the world, since Italy had broken away from the alliance with Germany. Italy had sent word to France that she need not keep troops on the Italian border, and had released whole armies without which Joffre and the French would never have held the Germans at the Marne. Italy had held off Austria in mountain-peaks of ice.

The Frenchman and the Britisher shouted that France and England had to save Italy from complete ruin on the Piave.

The Britisher observed that that first obliterated Hundred Thousand had been of vital help to France, and he spoke with ardor of the great fleet that kept the seas open night and day and made it possible for America to prepare her green troops and get them over.

Jim tossed imaginary flowers to each of the partizans, and quoted Schley's Spanish War word.

"There is glory enough for us all." There was shame enough for all, too, and sorrow, regret, and pity. America had her scandals, her cowards, grafters, traitors, shames, and shortcomings as well as the rest.

But Bob was his own opposite when he was in liquor. The soul of modesty and chivalry in sobriety, he was a fiend of arrogance and truculence under the metamorphosis of alcohol. He mocked the other nations, feeling an insane necessity for claiming his own country supreme in all things good, and pure of every evil. An aspersion on Columbia was as intolerable to Bob as a hint that his mother was immoral. People will outgrow the petty fallacies of patriotism and rise to the sublimities of internationalism on the same day that they realize how small it is to defend their own parents from criticism and oppose the communizing of their sisters and wives.

All the late Allies, robbed of the support of German hostility, shouted at one another, each against each and each against all. Nobody listened to anybody. Scarlet face glared into scarlet face. Fingers were shaken under noses. Sneer answered guffaw of derision. Each relapsed into his own speech and contented himself with confirming his own prejudice.

Jim Dryden was a marvel of equilibrium. He would have been a much better hero for a biography than Bob, if this were a book of wisdom or etiquette. Jim could fight upside down in the clouds, or rolling over and over. Even in the spinning universe about him now he kept his head. He tried to pluck the infuriate Bob from the burning.

He said, with majestic dignity: "Bob, old tharling, sinth these gemlemen are so self-suffithience, less—let us sleave them to their shelf-suffith— You know what I mean."

"No!" Bob roared, with the fire of a Patrick Henry as he flung off Dryden's hand. "We had to come over here and show these babies how to fight, and now they're tryin' to welsh on us. They won't give us credit."

The British officer retorted: "Credit, hell! You take the cash and let the credit go. What did you come over for but to collect your bills? After you'd sold us all the rotten goods we could absorb, you feared you'd be left out at the Peace Table. So you stuffed your conscripts into our ships to be in at the death. Count the dead, you bleedin' bounders! England and France lost more men by millions than all your swanking Yankees put together."

Dryden caught Bob's arm before he could empty his glass

into that British face. The contents drenched the *Croix de Guerre* on the Frenchman's cerulean uniform, and it took the Italian and the Belgian to hold him.

The quarrel attracted increasing attention. The music raged in vain. The dancers found the omens of battle more interesting than their jigs.

A Russian without a country held forth on the gigantic work of his people, the myriads of Germans they had slaughtered, the millions of troops they had kept busy. He roared that the Americans had only come in when Russia had succumbed to the Bolshevist assassinations. A Pole told how the Poles had been the backbone of Russian resistance while it lasted, and called attention to the Polish Legion from America. A Czecho-Slovak sang of the immortal retreat of that more than Xenophonian army.

A Canadian, a New-Zealander, a Rumanian, a Serb joined the mass about the table. Each had his country's prestige to maintain at all costs.

Nearly every man there had proved himself absolutely without fear of death. Every one loved his own people above all others. Every one had seen some fellow-soldier die, had known the devastation of the long war, and was poisoned by its toxins.

Nearly every one had some grudge against nearly every other nation. Each forgot his grudges against his own people, his own officers, or the politicians. A black rage filled the air with a gas, not a laughing, but a fighting, gas. Head waiters and foot waiters tried to calm the ominously buzzing swarm, tried to persuade the wranglers back to their tables. They were cursed and thrust aside. Women tried to coax their escorts to their interrupted communions again. But they were ignored.

Bob suffered Dryden to hold him in curb for a while. Then he broke free in a mad desire to vindicate America's divine superiority to all other nations. Dryden laughed and caught him about the arms and tried to carry him out to the street.

Bob wrenched loose.

Jim clinched.

Bob let drive a vicious blow.

Jim laughed and ducked.

Bob's fist smashed a Portuguese between the mustaches and the *mouche*.

He squealed with wrath and struck back wildly, landing behind the ear of an Anzac, who bumped into a resentful Canuck.

Now the fight was on. Everybody struck in all directions; women screamed and scampered; glasses crashed; silver tinkled; blood spurted. Men who had no interest in the fight, and had no idea as to what it was all about, or who struck whom first, felt the urge of storm in their nerves and ran into the fray. It was a splendid insanity, and the Germans would have loved it.

A scared waiter had dashed into the street for an *agent de police*. He had found a knot of M.P.'s loitering outside on the quiet curb. They came in with a will. It had been a dull evening for them. They were sober, and they had a good running start. They went through the chaos like battering-rams.

They found Bob and Jim fighting back to back, and they remembered their instructions. Bob and Jim were sobered by the horror of it. The more the twain protested that they were Americans the more they were pummeled, until at last, as Homer would have said, the merciful gods sent a dreamless sleep upon them—or, as we would say, they went out.

The M.P.'s decided that it was too late and too troublesome to make any arrests. They left their victims to their consciences and their mornings-after. Bob never could explain how or when he reached his own bed. He and Jim agreed eventually that they had seen enough of Paris.

They went back to their camp. Bob's ringing head was quite incapable of concocting a good lie to tell his colonel. The colonel was a wise officer who knew that it is not well for a commander to know too much. He gave Bob a sardonic stare and an ironic welcome.

"The last we heard of you you were doing a nose-spin. You must have lit good and hard. Glad to take you up from missing. That's all."

He did not explain that, acting on Jim Dryden's suggestion on the day of Bob's last fight, he had recommended the fallen hero for a cross of war to be given to his be-

reaved mother, with a beautiful account of her son's self-sacrifice.

When Bob found his name in the list of distinguished braves he wept because he felt himself unworthy. When he was sober he was the meekest of men, and much can be forgiven a soul that is haughty in disgrace and humble in triumph.

The homesickness seized him hard. He hated France and made himself more or less hateful to the French. They were as eager to see him and his fellows out of the country as the Americans were to be off.

The Allies had got on one another's nerves and seemed doomed to stay there. Average young Yankees went about cursing the French as thieves because prices were high. In America the papers were full of rancor against Americans on the same account. Cartoons of lynched profiteers were highly popular all over the world. But it seemed a little more heinous to be overcharged by a foreigner.

Normally decent young American officers went down Parisian boulevards singing indecent songs, and the next day berated French immorality.

When our Revolutionary War was ended by the rescuing French exactly the same state of affairs existed with terms reversed. The account that Rochambeau gave of American ingratitude and greed would express the American bitterness perfectly, *mutatis mutandis*.

The Americans, who had blazed with love of France and had spoken of her as of a holy land inspired by a divine race, now loathed the place and the people and made no bones of saying so. But it was not France or the French they hated; it was absence from home. As some one said, they would have been just as hateful of heaven if they had been quartered there. They would have slandered the angels as they did the French.

In after years they would speak tenderly of sacred France, and a mist of beauty would lend enchantment to the experience.

It was a long time, and the months seemed years, before Bob got his sailing orders. He had a narrow escape from garrison duty in Coblenz. Then one gay day he received his word. He and Jimmy Dryden just made Brest and the

transport gliding away. As his keel rolled home, Bob forgot his resentments against everybody and everything European, in his resentment against the fate that had mocked him with ten thousand dollars and his sweetheart with ten times as much.

The maddening thing about it was that he could not agree with himself upon either alternative—living without April or trying to live with her in spite of her incompatible opulence.

A week later Bob's airship soul shot soaring to the heavens again, for among the bundles of late newspapers thrown aboard the transport as it neared New York was a copy of the Sunday *Sun* with the page-wide head-lines:

ALL THE WORLD JOINS IN WILD SCRAMBLE FOR OIL-FORTUNES. ARGONAUTS OF 1919 SEEK UNTOLD MILLIONS IN PRECIOUS FLUID THAT ENRICHES MANY LANDS. RUSH LIKE THAT OF 'FORTY-NINERS TO TEXAS FIELDS. SPECULATION IN STOCK MARKETS IS FRENZIED. POOR MEN BECOME WEALTHY OVERNIGHT AND GREAT PROFITS ARE MADE ON "SHOESTRINGS."

Bob read this and ran to Jimmy Dryden, ran to him, as the negro spiritual says, "with a rainbow on his shoulder." And he cried:

"Eureka! Eureka! I have found it! I have found it!"

"Found what? Your last cootie?"

"Look, you poor fish! Here's where I make myself a billionaire."

While Jimmy read, Bob stood by, dancing clog-steps of joy. He burbled:

"With ten thousand dollars to start with, what can't I do? That's some shoestring, I'll say!"

"Not to mention a swell chance to lose it all."

"On your way, you crape-hanger! I got my start in the air at Texas, and here's where I go back and clean up."

"Get cleaned out, you mean," said the level-headed Dryden. "Look at this."

He held a copy of *The Tribune* under Bob's eyes. Bob read with majestic scorn the head-lines:

## WHAT'S THE WORLD COMING TO?

LAW POWERLESS TO STOP ORGY OF OIL SWINDLERS. WILDEST FRAUD IN HISTORY. STOCK EXCHANGE GOVERNORS SAY KAFIR AND GOLDFIELD CRAZES ARE FAR ECLIPSED.

Bob brushed the paper aside with a sweep like Cyrano's as he tossed his last coin to the players—the deed reckless, but the gesture magnificent.

"I never was afraid to take a chance," said Bob.

"But you were always afraid to take advice," said Jim.

"You're a good one to preach conservatism," Bob laughed, flicking the cross on Dryden's blouse. "You'd never have had that if you had been as careful as you want me to be."

Jim, for repartee, flicked the cross on Bob's blouse.

"And you'll lose that before you crawl back out of the oil-tanks."

"What'll you bet?"

"Cross against Cross."

"That I lose my money in oil?"

"Yes; if you go in."

"You're on!"

"How about that girl of yours?"

"She'll wait. I'm going away from her to get back to her."

"Many go away, but few come back."

Bob just laughed.

## CHAPTER VII

"WAS you ever hit wit' a sick tomatta?"

Nearly everybody in America by this time must have heard that plaintive question asked by Mr. McIntyre after he has been hit with one by Mr. Heath, his partner in that ambrosial vaudeville team.

Those who have not heard it ought to hear it; and those who have will be glad to hear it again, even in an inaccurate quotation from the sacred text of one of the finest passages in dramatic art, ancient or modern.

Mr. McIntyre, in a white-duck suit splashed with a great sunburst of red, detains a reluctant listener to explain his pathetic experience. He describes his sorrow at beholding his beloved yaller gal walking off with a fierce-looking colored stranger (Mr. Heath) who later appears with a revolver as a watch-charm.

Mr. McIntyre confesses that he made no more vigorous protest against the abduction than a pusillanimous and pathetic "'Hoo-oo!' Dat's all—jest 'Hoo-oo!'"

Thereupon the doubly injurious stranger, finding himself in front of a grocery-store, reached for a missile. His hand touched a basket of tomatoes. But he was not content merely to take a chance one from the top of the basket.

"He had to dribble 'em aside till he come to a tomatta what wasn't feelin' very well."

After further very wonderful descriptions of that woeful vegetable, Mr. McIntyre asks his listener:

"Was you ever hit wit' a brick? No? Well, dey's sumpin' noble about bein' hit wit' a brick. You kin see it a-comin'. But a tomatta! And a sick tomatta!"

There seems to be nothing else in literature that could express better the general feeling of Uncle Sam, John Bull, in fact old Mr. Everybody at the outcome of the war. The battle-sick world having hailed the arrival of Peace with

gigantic revelry, saw her walk off with a dark gentleman named Chaos, who at the first sigh of "Hoo-oo!" threw a sick tomatta that splashed all over the festive white garb of mankind.

In place of one nice big war there was a splash of a score of nasty little ones. Even the ceremony of welcoming soldiers home became the occasion of ferocious rows lasting for months. The Mayor's Committee of New York was a storm-center, and it seethed with resignations, declinations, charges, and recharges.

The poor soldiers were almost forgotten in the rumpus, and some of them were allowed to come up the Bay and sneak to the dock without a greeting. Others were overwhelmed with honors. But there were so many of them—two million and more, besides all the civilian hordes, and the women; and they poured in upon New York and other ports in a deluge. And their relatives poured into New York and other ports to meet them. Soldiers from the tamer portions inland were in no hurry to get back to the plow and the counter. New York needed a bit of looking over.

The problem of unemployment was a tremendous one at best. It was not simplified by the almost universal refusal of the soldiers to go back to the jobs they had had before. The little jaunt overseas and the long hike through hell had worked a revolution in every individual. Everybody suffered a sea-change and a war-change.

New York became one unresting seethe, like the gorge where the wide waters of Niagara try to rage through one whirlpool at once.

The largest hotel in the world, the Pennsylvania, and the next to the largest, the Commodore, were opened in the same week with thousands of rooms. And they were instantly packed. New guests walked into each room the moment the painter made his exit, and the lobbies were like theaters letting out.

A frenzy of rejoicing over eternal peace had set the world afire. Theoretically everybody was disgusted with the condition of the world. Practically everybody said, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we fight again." The craze for dancing had never abated during the war; it took on new ardor now.

Everybody had money to spend, and nobody seemed to know just where it came from or where it went. The appalling prices seemed to deter no one. Everybody protested, but spent. The prosperity had a strange effect on dramatic art, for the poorest plays were so patronized by the overflow from the better ones that they became financial triumphs and ran the season out. People had to go somewhere. They flowed along the streets in a kind of lava, looking for something to flow into. As soon as one place was clogged the stream automatically moved on to the next.

In the meanwhile the soldiers, in France, on guard in Germany, and in Siberia and in arctic Archangel, felt themselves abandoned by a heartless country.

They sang:

"We drove the Boche across the Rhine,
The Kaiser from his throne;
Oh, Lafayette, we've paid our debt.
For Christ's sake, send us home."

They had to vent their grudges on their neighbors or on one another. The remoter garrisons took to vodka with appalling enthusiasm. They grew unmanageable. Military discipline was a frail, elastic band that had lost its snap. An English soldier came home from Siberia with the query:

"Wot the bloomin' 'ell's the matter with the Yanks? 'Arf the American army is chysin' the other 'arf with fixed b'yonets."

Stupendous efforts were made to get the soldiers home before some terrific explosion took place. All winter, all spring, all summer they kept a-coming back and a-coming back.

The ship that brought Bob Taxter back home carried ten thousand men at once. It got into the Bay and lay there, fogbound, for several hours. Bob was tempted to jump overboard and swim ashore. He was in a frenzy not only to see April, but to plunge into the oil-fields and there turn his ten thousand dollars into a hundred thousand, half a million.

He read and reread what the newspapers told of the Texas fever. The more Jimmy Dryden pointed out the risk the more Bob was fascinated. The world had learned to love danger and to despise caution.

When the fog lifted, the mayor's boat was tardy and the transatlantic excursionists had to stick at anchor. When at last the committee of welcome arrived it found a left-handed welcome waiting for it. The ship was fairly stuccoed with heads, heads at every available point. Jeers and mob-humor greeted the officials. But the Statue of Liberty received a bombardment of cheers. She accepted them with lofty calm.

The ship drew up at last at the pier in Hoboken. The bulk of the men lived far to the west. But all eyes clung to the unequaled splendor of the New York sierra. It was a marvelous thing to have come back to Paradise Regained. It was sublime not to have stayed in France beneath one of those seventy thousand little crosses.

Bob needed only one thing to perfect his home-coming, and that was the sight of April standing on the shore, waiting to greet him. He felt that her very beauty would make her as conspicuous in the multitudes as the Statue of Liberty. He had been a little surprised that she was not on the mayor's boat. He had half expected to see her drift up through an eddy with mermaidenly grace and wave a dripping arm to him.

But returning to New York in a transport was somewhat different from coming back to Greece from Troy. Girls could not wait on the beach till the prow came lunging in ahead of the sand-grooving keel. Transports had to crawl up the populous river and be slowly warped into huge slips between vast sheds. And the rules were strict. Soldiers were not supposed to be met until they had been de-loused, sterilized and invoiced and receipted for; only the most extraordinary pull could procure a pass to the dock, and even then the most tireless patience and ingenuity could hardly manage to meet the right boat at the right time, or find the individual sought for in the panic of debarkation and transfer to the demobilization camps.

April had made some preliminary investigations and learned that it would be a fool's errand to hunt for Bob, especially as she could get no hint as to the time of his arrival. He had sent her two or three cables saying that he would sail on such or such a boat only to be held back for one reason or another. He had despatched a wireless

into the air from the transport, but her letter giving her new address was packed in a trunk he could not reach, and his memory played him false.

Sending a telegram to the house next door in New York is about as vain as addressing it to another planet. When Bob wrote down the right house-number, but the wrong street and the wrong side of the town, he might as well have saved the price of the message. His wireless never reached April.

But Bob assumed, as senders do, that the addressees are always in error, and he was greatly cut up about April's dereliction. The war had taught him that no excuse is good for a failure to arrive on the firing-line at the critical moment. He had a foolish feeling that even if the wireless missed her, some womanly intuition ought to have told April that he would land, and just where and when, if she really cared.

What was the use of telepathy and the subconscious and all that sort of thing which so many scientists were advertising if they could not even get a fellow's girl to a dock?

Bob was bitterly disappointed in April, and his only consolation was the thought that when he was an oil-millionaire he might take up with some other girl just to teach her a lesson.

## CHAPTER VIII

APRIL was in an ideal mood for receiving telegrams, too, but something insulated her and Bob from each other, though both of them were sending out soul-sparks in waves of high voltage. The very morning that Bob landed, April was so lonely for him that she begged off from her Motor Corps work on the plea of a sick headache which was really a sick heartache. She felt a sudden call to go home to her studio and work on the ideal statue of Bob that had occupied many a spare hour. It had been a doleful comfort to her to build an image of her idol; it kept her hands busy as well as her love.

She had left her mother opening a new batch of letters inviting her attention to ideal investments. The Chatterson legacy had been mentioned in the newspapers, and it had attracted the attention of all the legitimate and illegitimate capital-hunters who are accustomed to work through the mails. An incessant stream of letters had been falling about Mrs. Summerlin's bewildered head ever since.

Where hundreds of money-hunters had been content to beseech her attention through letters and circulars a dozen had succeeded in getting emissaries to her on various pretexts. Among the most winning of these was the elderly Mr. Kenneth Kellogg, who masked his adroit campaigns against her fortune under a subtly implied infatuation for herself. Mrs. Summerlin had been a widow for a good while. She was pretty and human and Southern, and she enjoyed attention. It did not seem unreasonable that a man should fall in love with her. She had no intention of loving anybody, she told herself and her daughter, but it is hard to be insulted by respectful adoration. Mr. Kellogg seemed to adore; and he was certainly respectful. He talked money only when she brought it up, and he apparently had plenty of his own. He was liberal with it, too. He had

taken her and April to the theater on many a dull evening. He was very felicitous with flowers.

Ever since April left, Mrs. Summerlin had alternated between answering the telephone and studying the letters, all of them written with all of the allurement of practised solicitors. Her only safety was in the number of irresistible attractions.

Shortly before April got home; the telephone rang for the fifth or sixth time. Mrs. Summerlin, immobilized by a lapful of letters, called out to the faithful old negress who was still all the servants of that household:

"Pansy! Pansy! The telephone—the telephone!"

The wrinkled crone whom Fate had tried to deride by naming her Pansy shuffled into the studio, grumbling:

"I year it. I tell you dat ol' telephome has just abote wrung me ote these las' few months." She took down the receiver and put it to her ear, and her big lips to the transmitter with the effect of a trained chimpanzee, and called into it.

"Hello, hello! Who? Oh! Yassa! Nossa! Wait a minute, please." She turned and called to Mrs. Summerlin:

"It's Mistoo Kellogg. He wants to know can he come ova to see you-all."

Mrs. Summerlin was in need of a rescuer. She gasped, "Oh, I wish he would!"

Pansy repeated the message with a grimace: "Oh, we wish you would! Wait a minute, please." She turned again to ask: "He asks is Miss April home? I know she ain't, but is she?"

"Tell him she's out with her car. But I'd like some advice about our odious money."

Pansy, the transmitter, passed along the message. "We ain't expectin' Miss Summalin, but Miz Summalin says p'r'aps you could give us some 'vice abote our odorless money. Yassa. Good-bysa."

She turned. "He says he'll be here pleasantly." She gazed at the gray-haired widow who was still to her the little girl she had always tyrannized over, and said:

"He didn't seem to be ve'y sorry to hear Miss April ain't year. Look lak that man gittin' fancy notions abote yew, Miss Ma'y. You ain't lookin' to take up wit' no Nawtherner lak what he is—is ye or is ye?"

"You'd better be looking to your kitchen!" Mrs. Summerlin snapped. Pansy laughed as at an impertinent child, and started to shuffle out, but paused as Mrs. Summerlin tore a letter in two angrily and threw it at the waste-basket, a target on which her percentage of hits was not high. Pansy laughed.

"Who dat? Some otha Nawtheren gemman makin' up to yew?"

Mrs. Summerlin ignored the privileged impudence and sniffed:

"Humph! They only offa six per cent. on the investment."

"Is dat all?" said Pansy, blankly, shaking her head in amazement as Mrs. Summerlin ripped another letter across and missed the basket again. Pansy moved over, dropped on her knees, picked up the letter and pushed it down into the basket as Mrs. Summerlin sniffed again:

"Humph! Only twenty per cent.!"

"It's gettin' betta, anyhow," Pansy suggested.

Mrs. Summerlin patted a stack of letters on her desk and said: "But all of these guarantee from a hundred to a thousand per cent."

"Is dat much?" Pansy wondered, aloud.

"Much? Why, a hundred per cent. on a hundred thousand dollars is—let me see." She started to figure on the back of an envelop, then gave it up. "It's—well, anyway, it's a great deal of money."

"But do you git it?" said Pansy, whose experienced ignorance made her skeptical of all promises.

"Why, they guarantee it!" Mrs. Summerlin exclaimed.

"But why? Dat's what I ast you—why?"

"Why? Why, because we lend them our money; they get the use of it, don't you see?"

"Oh, dey git de use of it! Ump-umm! If me was you, I'd take de use of dat money ma own se'f."

"You're no financier, Pansy."

"No'm. I been called 'mos' all de names dey is, but nobody ever allowed I was a—what you said."

"Listen to this," said Mrs. Summerlin, reading aloud, more for company than counsel: "'*It is almost harder to keep money than to make it. Learning of your good fortune, and*

*realizing that there are countless swindlers laying traps for the unwary, we beg to offer you the opportunity of a lifetime to acquire stock in the most wonderful invention of our times—'"*

"What use you-all got for a invention?"

"It's not the invention, but the stock."

"Me, I don't take much stock in no stocks."

Mrs. Summerlin smiled at her stubbornness and read the next:

"'*Dear Madam: Did you know that the original telephone stock was sold at four dollars a share—*'"

"No'm, I didn't!"

"'*—and is now worth four thousand dollars a share?*'"

"Better do like I do—keep it in a sock, 'stead of a stock."

Mrs. Summerlin pried open another envelop and skimmed its contents. "*The opportunity of a lifetime! Did you know —original telephone stock—four dollars—four thousand—*"

This letter joined the jetsam on the floor. Pansy scooped it up.

"If you don't hit dat old 'vestment any closer 'n what you hit dis was'e-basket, you'm a goner. You betta take my advice and spend yo' money yo' own se'f."

"Don't bother me. Can't you see I'm busy?"

"I'm older 'n what you is, honey, by goin' on a hund'ed per cent.—"

"But what do you know about money?"

"I don' know nothin'. Dat's why I's lived so long. I's noticed dat folks what has money mostly buys trouble wid it."

Reading on, Mrs. Summerlin absently justified herself:

"Well, it was left to us in a legacy, and we've got to do something with it."

"Seems to me I'd lay out some of it on clo'es for dat child of yours—growed-up young lady goin' round in breeches and boots!"

"Why, that's her Motor Corps costume! She's done wonderful good with it, driving her ambulance like a Sister of Charity."

"I never seen no Sister of Charity goin' round in pants. I tell you, if de Lawd wanted women goin' round in pants, He'd 'a' provided 'em. Kin you 'magine me—"

"Pansy! Don't be indecent!"

"No'm, I ain't goin' to be."

"Besides, now that the demobilization is beginning, Miss April will be giving up her uniform and going back to petticoats."

"It's hah tahm!" cried Pansy; "hah tahm!"

Mrs. Summerlin gazed at the remaining letters with discouragement.

"To think that I should live to be worried by too much money!"

"Dat certain'y is a new kind of trouble for us Summalins."

"And nobody I can trust—just us two women!"

"Us two? Ain't I yeah?" Pansy demanded, deeply wounded.

"Oh yes, but we need a man's advice."

The sound of a key was heard in the door, and Pansy struggled to her feet.

"Year's de young gemman of de family—latch-key and all."

April came in slowly and moodily, flinging her cap aside, touching her hair up idly and going somnambulistically across the room to kiss her mother.

Pansy stared at her and broke out again:

"Lawdy, child, I'll be glad when you goes back to common sense and pettiskirts. I'm just achin' to see you a lady ag'in."

April turned on her petulantly. "Do you see anything immodest about this costume?"

"I ain't said nothin' about immodes'," Pansy explained; "it's the stravagance."

"Why, these clothes are not extravagant! One uniform has lasted all this time."

"I'm tellin' you dem duds is spendfrift!"

"How so?"

"'Ca'se, I say, women ought to save they laigs for special occasiums. It's ma opinion dat ev'body ought to keep a few secrets for a rainy day."

Mrs. Summerlin was shocked. "Pansy, you go right along about your business this very minute."

"Yassum!" said Pansy, toting the waste-basket with her, but pausing to point to the letters on the desk and suggest:

"Better lea' me carry dem off, too. Save you a lot mo' stravagance."

Mrs. Summerlin motioned her away, and she went out

lugging the basket-load of opportunities of a lifetime. She made a curious burlesque in black marble of the Nymph of Plenty that April had so admired. Now April, glancing at the remaining heaps, smiled over at her mother.

"Still reading love-letters?"

Her mother sighed: "Every one of these is the opportunity of a lifetime. Did you know, honey, that you could have bought the original Bell Telephone stock at four dollars a share? And now it's four thousand dollars."

"Sorry I didn't hear about it at the time," said April, as she slipped her arms through a modeling-apron and went to her stand. "Funny! Everybody in the world seems to have read about our legacy in the papers. That Mr. Clyde we met a few weeks ago is positively oppressive with his attentions. I finally decided to turn him loose on you. Has he called yet."

"No, and he needn't. I've asked Mr. Kellogg to come over. I've got to have some help. That Mr. Clyde is in Wall Street, isn't he?"

"No, he's in Broad Street. He says there are the most wonderful opportunities to make perfect scads of money on the Stock Exchange. He says there has never been known such a panic of prosperity; two-million-share days are common on the Street now, and money is simply boiling over, he says."

"Now, honey, we're not going into any stock-market schemes. We must keep out of Wall Street—and Broad Street, too."

"It's the place to make the big money, Mr. Clyde says."

"Oh dear! You're just like your father. He never had any business instinct. Now, my father—"

"Died poor."

"Yes, but he had a wonderful business instinct. which I inherit."

April smiled with the patronizing tolerance of youth for elderly illusions and went on shaping and reshaping the oiled-clay statuette of her lover, wondering where he was and never dreaming that he was in Hoboken at that very moment, wondering where she was.

She and her mother were both silent at their tasks when Mr. Kellogg arrived, a glistening, globular man with a soapy smile.

He carried a bouquet of flowers as a sort of flag of truce. April watched her mother being flattered, and felt the impatience of youth for parental susceptibility to blandishments. She did not see that Mrs. Summerlin's heart went out to the flowers rather than to their profferer.

Mr. Kellogg wandered over to April with his well-creased palm up, but she said:

"My hands are impossible."

He stared at her work and chortled, "Doing a little modeling, eh?"

"Sherlock Holmes!"

He shook a pudgy forefinger at her and turned back to his more definite client, who moaned:

"Oh, Mr. Kellogg, I'm in such distress! Just look at these letters—all of them offering us fortunes. I've thrown away all the cheap ones that promise only ten or twenty per cent. These offer us at least a hundred. By the way, how much is a hundred per cent. on a hundred thousand dollars, Mr. Kellogg?"

"A hundred thousand dollars," said Kellogg.

"Yes, just how much is a hundred per cent. on it?"

"A hundred thousand dollars."

Mrs. Summerlin was a bit vexed at his stupidity. "That's what I said. I could figure it out myself, but I'm so busy. How much is a hundred per cent. on our money?"

Kellogg was desperately patient. He put it more plainly. "A hundred per cent. on a hundred thousand dollars is a hundred thousand dollars."

"Oh, I see," said Mrs. Summerlin with great wisdom. "Then if we get a hundred per cent., we shall have all we began with and just as much more?"

"If you get it," Kellogg smiled.

"Of course we'd get it," Mrs. Summerlin averred. "I wouldn't put the money into anything that wasn't sure. They'd have to give me their solemn promise as to that. But I hardly know how to decide."

April came over to chaperon their intimacy. Wiping her hands on her apron, she cried:

"I'll close my eyes and pick one."

"Fine!" said Mrs. Summerlin, who welcomed any means of decision. She held out a sheaf and shut her own eyes

while April shut hers. One poked and the other groped without reaching them; both opened their eyes. April found the sheaf, ran her hand along it, and pulled out an envelop.

"There!"

"Oh, let's see what it is!" cried Mrs. Summerlin, reading aloud as April read aloud, and pushing her index-finger along the lines: "'*Dear Madam: Having heard of your good —opportunity of a lifetime.*'" April lifted her mother's finger. "'*Did you know that the ocean is full of gold? Instead of digging shafts in mountains, it is only necessary to*'—move your finger, mother—'*to dredge the ocean and run the water through a strainer to obtain fabulous wealth. . . . We can offer you a few shares of either the common or the preferred stock!*'"

"It sounds wonderful. I like gold!" Mrs. Summerlin cried.

"I prefer the preferred stock," said April, solemnly.

Her mother agreed: "Oh yes, we shouldn't like to put Uncle Randolph's money into anything common. And you see they guarantee a hundred per cent. That's nice!"

Mr. Kellogg, who had watched the affair with a nursery smile, broke in fretfully:

"My dear ladies! These things are all cheats and swindles. Anything that offers such profit is more than suspicious. You've thrown the wrong letters away. Put these in the fire—or you might as well put your money there."

Mrs. Summerlin gave a cry of anguish at this cynicism.

"Then how on earth are we going to invest it?" she pleaded.

Kellogg felt that his time had come. He said:

"I hesitate to advise you, but if you really want my advice—well, there is one sure-fire, gilt-edge proposition on the market. It is bound to net you between fifteen and twenty per cent. a year."

"How much is that?" asked Mrs. Summerlin.

"Fifteen or twenty thousand dollars a year, as the case may be."

April protested: "But I thought we were going to be rich, Mr. Kellogg. Mr. Clyde said he could make us rich."

"Hugo Clyde?" Kellogg demanded, and when April nodded, he sneered, "Humph! He's a stock-broker!"

"You see! I told you so," said Mrs. Summerlin. But April was miffed enough to say:

"Funny! When I mentioned you he said: 'Kellogg! Humph! He's a promoter!'"

Kellogg turned so purple that April was afraid he would fall down and die of apoplexy on the spot.

"Is that so awful?" she gasped. "I'm terribly sorry. Please forgive me."

Kellogg was heartbrokenly gracious, but he needed a deal of comforting, and he declined to mention his gilt-edged proposition. They were still trying to console him when Mr. Clyde was announced on the telephone. Mrs. Summerlin was for sending him away, but Kellogg urged:

"Talk to him, by all means; but remember, he's a plunger. Now I believe in being a little wary. My name is Kenneth Kellogg; they call me Kautious and Konservative—you see, two *K's!* Ha-ha!—see?"

"I see," said April. "But Mr. Clyde seems to be very charming."

"He has to be," said Kellogg. "That's his game. He goes about luring people. Those Wall Street men spend half their time making friends for the one purpose of decoying them into their webs."

The bell cut short his indictment of that infinitely indicted street. Pansy admitted Mr. Clyde, who looked the broker somehow, though there is no end to the variety of brokers. He was young, glossy, tailory, and as alert as a sparrow. He brought no flowers but his own gay presence. He greeted April with easy admiration and took his presentation to Mrs. Summerlin with cheerful grace. It was only when he saw Kellogg's sultry rotundity that he lost his effulgence. He recovered his manner at once, and asked with grinning impudence:

"How long have you been here?"

"Half an hour," said Kellogg.

Clyde pulled a long face and groaned: "'Tis enough. He's got all you've got. I'll be going."

"Oh! we haven't decided anything yet," April interposed. "I wouldn't let mother decide till she talked to you."

"Ah! I breathe again."

Mrs. Summerlin felt called upon to sober his too flippant manner. "I may as well warn you, Mr. Clyde, that I have made up my mind to keep out of Wall Street."

"Then there's no use of my trying to change it," said Clyde, always the good loser; he had had a lot of practice in losing.

Mrs. Summerlin was offended. "You mean that I am not open to reason? Just to prove it, I'll let you convince me."

"Mrs. Summerlin!" Kellogg gasped. Mrs. Summerlin finished her sentence with crushing gravity:

"—if your arguments are sound."

Kellogg grumbled, "That's all they are—sound!" But he did not wait for Clyde to get the first attention of the lambs. He proceeded to spread out his own wares:

"Now I offer these ladies a chance to buy into a legitimate enterprise, something solid."

"Such as?" Clyde grinned expectantly.

"Community houses, the latest development in social evolution," said Kellogg, as if he were reeling off a memorized prospectus. "People used to live in caves, then in houses, then in rented apartments. The servant problem is the most terrible problem of modern life. Cooks are paid like bank presidents, and they demand their own maids. They fight with all the other servants.

"In recent years people have been putting up apartment-houses in which each tenant owns his own apartment—just as if they put their private houses on top of one another, or as if the streets ran up and down instead of east and west or north and south. Several of these buildings have made fortunes for their first owners. The apartments can always be rented for so much that in a few years they pay for themselves; the rest is velvet.

"But still the servant problem remains. The new stroke of genius is to combine the hotel with the home—the advantages of both, the faults of neither. A common kitchen cooks for all the families. You can do your own marketing, or not, as you please. You order your meal, and the corporation cooks and serves it. The corporation employs the servants and takes all the trouble off your mind. The corporation provides the housemaids, chambermaids, valets, refrigerators, vacuum-cleaners, kitchen utensils, chefs, waiters, porters, everything, everybody! It is heaven on earth at last!

"Imagine, Mrs. Summerlin and Miss Summerlin, that you owned this beautiful apartment! You would pay no rent. You could go away for the summer or travel during the winter, and make enough money to keep you in luxury. By putting your money into several apartments and renting them you would have an income for life. You would be landlords in a royal sense and live prosperously ever afterward. What do you think of the picture?"

"It is certainly beautifully painted," said Mrs. Summerlin, dazzled by the vision. "It would be wonderful to own so much property, wouldn't it, April?"

"Wonderful," said April.

Clyde felt that his customers were being kidnapped. He broke in:

"But how long will it take to finish all these heavenly homes? You'd have to wait for years, perhaps, before you could realize a penny. Building materials and labor are higher than they've ever been in human history, and harder to get." He turned to Kellogg. "And once their money is in, it's in, isn't it?"

Kellogg resented the satanic sneer at his glowing work of art. He snapped:

"Of course! Put it in and forget it."

"Forget it?" laughed Clyde. "Kiss it good-by! I say put it in Wall Street and watch it."

Now Kellogg laughed. "Watch it? It's gone while you're batting your eyes."

"Not if you buy outright and wait for a rise."

"You see, he says wait, too," Kellogg cried.

"But you can always cash in," Clyde protested. "Within twenty-four hours you can realize."

"If you'll stand a loss or take a tiny profit."

"If you want quicker and bigger returns," Clyde urged, "buy on a margin."

Mrs. Summerlin spoke up eagerly: "Oh, do explain that margin to me. It isn't anything like the selvage?"

"Not exactly," said Clyde, taking an envelop and a pencil from his pockets, "but it's very simple. Now, for example, suppose steel is quoted at forty-nine—"

While he fascinated Mrs. Summerlin, Kellogg turned dismally to April:

"You see—he's hypnotizing your mother. That's his business."

"He's not hypnotizing me," said April. "I rather like that own-your-own-home-your-own-self idea. I might be—" She was going to say "getting married soon," but she preferred to keep that dream to herself. She was wakened from it by her mother's:

"Oh, I see! It's very simple. I never understood margins before. Aren't they lovely? Well, April, I am convinced that you were right. Wall Street is our street. It's been dreadfully slandered."

"No, mother," said April, "I'm convinced I was wrong. You were right."

Mrs. Summerlin declined to be put in the right against her mood

"No, I'm for Wall Street. I'm a bear—or do I mean the other animal?"

Kellogg forgot his suavity. He sniffed like the bull she dared not mention.

"Wall Street? Why, they fleece lambs like you in droves."

"But we shouldn't be lambs," Mrs. Summerlin retorted. "We'd be margins."

"People drop a million in a day there on margins," Kellogg persisted.

April had an inspiration born of her thought of a home. She murmured:

"Perhaps we'd better not go into either scheme just yet, mother. We'd better wait for Bob."

"Oh! of course, Bob!" acceded Mrs. Summerlin, already dizzy from the height of her financial upshoot.

Kellogg and Clyde glared at each other in common discomfiture like two pickpockets who find themselves working the same side of the street.

"And who's Bob?" Kellogg grumbled.

"He's my—he's a boyhood friend of mine," said April.

"But does he know money?" Clyde asked.

"Why, he's just come into ten thousand dollars!"

Both Kellogg and Clyde had the same happy thought—another come-on! Both gasped:

"Where is he?"

"Heaven knows," April sighed. "He is still in France, I

reckon. But he'll be back one of these days, and I think we'll just put off any decision till he gets here. Don't you agree with me, mother?"

"Perfectly, honey."

There seemed nothing more for Kellogg and Clyde to accomplish by lingering. Each sought the victim he had played most patiently.

Kellogg smothered Mrs. Summerlin's slim hand in his pillowy palm and murmured:

"By all means, take your time, Mrs. Summerlin. But don't do anything final till you consult me. Remember that your welfare is very close to my heart—very close, my dear Mrs. Summerlin."

He bent and kissed one knuckle and backed into April's statue of Bob, setting it wavering for a fall that April prevented with a cry of fear.

Mrs. Summerlin's gasp, "Gre't Heavens!" was hardly so much from anxiety for the statue as from amazement at Mr. Kellogg's fervor. She was still feeling uncomfortable about the knuckles as the flustered Kellogg groped for his hat and then for the door-knob, and backed out into a temporary oblivion.

In the meanwhile, Clyde, who had hastened to the assistance of April and caught the statue in his hands, was enjoying an unusual privilege. April was cleansing his immaculate fingers of the oily clay with her own apron.

The warmth of her hand and the warmth of her friendship as she thanked him for his promptness set his brain to simmering, and he ventured to breathe into the hair of her downbent head:

"Is it asking too much, Miss Summerlin, to ask you to let me meet Bob, as you call him?"

"No, indeed," said April. "He'd be grateful for your kindness to us, I'm sure."

"That kindness is based on a deep personal affec—interest, Miss April. I don't know who Bob is—is he a relative?"

"Well, he may be—by marriage."

"Oh, you're leaving your heart to Bob, too?"

April laughed uncomfortably. "He has an option on it—or a margin, or whatever you call it."

This was a great shock to Mr. Clyde. But he had heard

of betrothals as well as of financial deals that fell through, and so he left a sort of romance-card on her:

"In any case, my advice would always be based on more than a business interest in you. A man wouldn't deceive a woman that he loved, now, would he?"

"It has been done, I believe," said April, lightly but grimly.

"Er—well, possibly; but I wouldn't. Good-by, then, till I hear from you. Good-by, Mrs. Summerlin. Good-by. Good-by."

And he was gone.

The cynicism of April's that had put him to flight was really directed toward her uncertainty of Bob. She wondered why he lingered still among those sirens of France. In the late afternoon paper she saw his name among the arrivals on a transport that morning. This confirmed her fear that he had ceased to care for her.

## CHAPTER IX

BOB, fretting bitterly at April's indifference to his return from the fields of death, was sent to Camp Mills. And there he met Claudia Reece, who had motored over to see her major-general, for whom she had been shipped out of France.

The major-general pointed out Jimmy Dryden and Bob Taxter as two of his ship-companions, and Claudia did not hesitate to run out and seize Bob and introduce herself as April's friend. She was really counting on having Jimmy Dryden presented to her. She counted on herself to do the rest.

But Bob went up in the air so far at the mention of April's name that Jimmy got away. Bob frankly confessed his heartbreak at April's failure to answer his wireless, and Claudia said that April had telephoned that very morning bemoaning her failure to hear from Bob.

Claudia gave him April's telephone numbers at home and at the headquarters of the Motor Corps, and Bob ran for the nearest booth, leaving Claudia to go back to her disprized major-general.

By and by Bob had April on the wire. They seemed to be as close as Pyramus and Thisbe. The chink was too narrow and too deep to kiss through, but they poured out love-calls across the wire, heedless of Central's burning ears.

Bob vowed that he would either get leave of absence for the next day or go A. W. O. L., and they agreed to take lunch together. She would have received him at home, but she did not want to have her mother hanging round at the first meeting, and they appointed the lobby of the Commodore as their trysting-place.

The next noon April found the huge palm-filled *patio* of the lobby a viscid ooze of men in uniforms, uniforms at-

tached to girls, and old women and old men. A few parents were there, their eyes shining with pride, rejoicing in the luck that gave them back their sons.

It touched April to tears to see the meetings of some of the people.

Here was an old father waiting with his daughter-in-law and a baby. Up the steps came loping a soldier.

There were snickers, giggles, mumblings of trivial words, embraces snatched in embarrassment, quickly to escape observation. These souls had known the noblest experiences. They had given their man to their country. It had taken him, drilled him, worked him, dressed him, shipped him overseas, and flung him as a mere missile at the enemy's guns. They must have suffered the bitterest woes. And the man had gone down into the pit of misery, for April could see the wound chevrons on his sleeve and the little cross swinging above his breast-pocket.

The experience was inspiring, but the words wanted. The father, made a child again, cuffed his son as if his son were an elder brother, and nudged the wife as if she were another urchin, and stammered:

"Well, it's kind of nice to see the boy back, ain't it?"

And the wife groaned, "I should say it was!"

And the hero said, "That's some baby, if you ask me."

And the baby howled.

April could not help seeing that the old man chewed tobacco; the hero's uniform looked as if he had slept in it; the wife had a few teeth missing, and one gold crown that flashed and vanished unpleasantly as her grin waxed or waned. And the baby had prickly heat and would have been the better for a change of linen.

They had sounded the heights and depths of glory and fear. And they were all uncomfortable in the consummation. They had known just what to do in war-time; but what was to be done with the peace?

April, who had been dreaming of statues to commemorate the great days and wondering what figure of allegory could be splendid enough, shuddered at the dismal realism.

There Bob was, coming up the steps with two or three other officers. She noted how browner and bigger he was, how less boyish, how well he had taken care of himself, and

how unnecessary she had been to his triumph. She felt afraid of him.

He did not recognize her at first in her Motor Corps clothes. She had to call his name to catch his eye. Then he darted to her with a loud guffaw of surprise.

He, too, used the most commonplace words imaginable.

"April! Well, well! April! Golly! How are you, anyhow?"

He flung out his arms and would have swept her in. But she dodged him and could have beaten herself for it an instant later. His lips came just close enough to hers to assure her that he had had a drink. That might have explained the fierce glare of rebuke that hardened his eyes for a moment. She had disappointed him. His soul had dwelt long on this blissful shock of reunion. But he understood her timidity, on second thought, and liked her perhaps a little better for being more girlishly shy than she looked in her martial garb. He turned to one of his companions.

"This is Jimmy Dryden, the best ever. Miss Summerlin, permit me to present Captain Dryden. This is April, Jimmy—beaucoup fille, eh? je dirais she is, quoi?"

While Jimmy bowed over April's hand, Bob rattled on:

"Old air-pal of mine, Jimmy—used to go out and bring down a couple of Boches for breakfast every morning."

Jimmy ignored the flattery and as usual said the right thing:

"Well, I've brought Bob back to you, Miss Summerlin. He's been eating his heart out for you. I don't wonder. But you're making no mistake in Bob, either. He's one genuine little gimper, if ever there was one."

"What's a gimper?" said April.

But Jimmy was being dragged away to meet the girl of another fellow, and he did not answer the question. Bob did not seem too anxious to keep Jimmy on the string, but deserted him among friends as he had not deserted him among enemies.

Bob slipped his arm through April's and clasped her hand in his, pressed her elbow against his side, and with idolatry in his devouring eyes murmured, poetically:

"Let's eat."

April laughed at the boyishness of this. Perhaps she

prized him more as a cub than if he had improvised a rondeau for her. They found every table occupied and a queue at every dining-room. April said:

"Wouldn't you rather come home with me?"

"You bet!" he groaned, not quite daring to voice his thought. "Anything to be alone with you."

She fetched a chaperon for this wild fancy at once: "Mamma is dying to see you."

There was a hint of forcing in his polite enthusiasm: "Fine! How is the old girl?"

April laughed again. It was pleasant to see through his simple moods. It was very comfortable to have him so transparent. Later she would find curtains coming down as she peeked into various windows of his soul. That would be more exciting, but not at all pleasant.

They ran down the steps and out into the street. The starter whistled up a taxicab. The day was warm, and the cab had the top let down. Bob was never more fearless than when he marched past it and hoisted April into the next one, which was closed.

April blushed at the manifest intention and felt that her dignity was compromised.

"Why did you do that?" she demanded as the cab jounced away.

"For this!" Bob muttered as he put out his arms and, despite her mutiny and heedless of the crowded street, clenched her in a fierce embrace, thrilled to find her so round and soft and lithely feminine—all the more thrilled because she fought him. It was as if a captive wild swan struggled to escape, and it pleased him to be compelled to put forth all his strength to hold her.

He would not let her go until she gave up and took his kiss full on her lips. He had not known that lips could mean so much. It seemed that all of her was there, soul and body and all, and all his. Her mouth was like a flower on fire.

He fell back with a sigh of ecstasy. "That was worth fighting for."

April was one confusion, amazed at him and at herself, and she had to be angry in self-defense against her own rapture.

"You've learned a few things in France, I see."

Bob was aghast at such seeming cynicism. "April!" he gasped. Trying to justify herself for the atrocious sacrilege, she made it worse:

"How many others have you had in your arms since I saw you last?"

Down went a curtain—bang! His quick temper leaped to arms. He had learned to meet attack with attack.

"The same to you," he snapped. "And how many of them?"

She wanted to hurt him, and she knew how.

She taunted him: "Don't you wish you knew?"

With the strange perversity of lovers, or the divine correction that checks them when they climb too near heaven, they had managed to get back to the bleak earth from the pink clouds in a hurry.

They rode the rest of the way in wretched silence, their thoughts veering and darting like the taxicab that bore them.

## CHAPTER X

THEY were a miserable and chastened pair when they reached April's home. As they went into the lobby they encountered the old negro whom April had seen on the day of the false armistice. He was loafing by the desk and was not burdened with his vacuum-cleaning machinery. April did not recognize him till he grinned, brushed his hat off his head, and bowed very low.

"Fine day, missy, fine day!" He laughed as if this fact were the most amusing thing in the world.

"Yes, very nice," said April, as if it were the most dismal fact imaginable. She moved on to the elevator, but the old man came slip-slopping after her.

"'Scuse me, missy; but elevato'-boy been tellin' me you allowed you might need me some day. In case you does, year's ma card."

He offered her a pasteboard which she took with a little smile.

"Thanks, Uncle."

"Dat's it—'Uncle'!" the old man whooped.

"Who's all that?" said Bob as the elevator went up.

"Some relative of yours," said April, handing him the card. Bob read it with a smile that would not stay on:

PROFESSOR ZEBULON TAXTER

PRACTICAL VACUUM CLEANER

Apartments and houses cleaned artistic and sanitery.
Rates reasonable Special rates for regular costumers
1312 West 53rd street. Also rugs cleaned.

Bob returned the card with a grimace of pain. He and April were incapable of gleaning a laugh out of what would have set them off insanely in a more cheerful mood.

Southerners are used to finding their lofty names worn

by the lowly descendants of slaves, and Bob forgot the man and his business. Even Uncle Zeb did not dream that he was drawing nearer and nearer to his prey.

Mrs. Summerlin gathered Bob into her arms and gave him a motherly welcome that had him purring again. He was ready to forgive April now and she to be forgiven; but his roving eyes caught sight of the new clay figure she had been struggling with.

The poor girl had wanted to design a monument for Bob's own superb achievement as an aviator. She had planned to show him as a modern angel, in the full uniform of an aviator with a pair of great wings added. She had arrived only at the crude figure of a man. She had not yet reached the point for adding either the uniform or the wings. All Bob saw was the rough outline of a naked man in green clay with the muscles laid on in exaggerated cords.

Bob's longing to keep April innocent took the sardonic form of a suspicious challenge:

"And who was the model for all that?"

And her anguish at his insinuation took the form of that taunting refrain of hers:

"Don't you wish you knew?"

She teased, enraged, and fascinated him like another Carmen driving her soldier into a complete frenzy.

Mrs. Summerlin gazed at them aghast. "Good Lord! Are you two children fighting again, already? Is this another of those false armistices?"

Bob laughed sheepishly. "Oh no! No, indeed, Mrs. Summerlin. I was only wondering who posed for April's little statue there."

Mrs. Summerlin ended the nonsense with a word. "Why, nobody posed, of course! Who'd you suppose posed? April has been puttering away at that for months. She began it one day when she had one of her premonitions that you had been killed in France. She called you an angel and said she was going to make a gre't monument for you. And I hope you're not going to—"

Bob did not wait to find out the end of that "going to." He broke in:

"Why, of course not, Mrs. Summerlin! I was just thinking it was so fine that she must have had a model."

Bob had both the defects of his qualities and the qualities of his defects. He had a hair-trigger temper, and he shot off accusations point-blank, but he was just as quick with his apologies, and he fairly riddled himself with them.

"Aw, April!" he pleaded. "I'm a rotten, low-down hound, and I don't see why you allow me around at all. It was just beautiful of you to think of me. Only, if you made a statue of me, it ought to be some old yella coon-dog, not a wonderful Apollo like that."

April's eyes twinkled with tears of luxurious forgiveness. "That's all right, Bob. Don't think anything more about it. I ought to have put it out of sight before you came in."

"Out of sight!" cried Bob. "Well, hardly! When you get that finished I'm going to have it cast in solid gold and set up in Central Park somewhere. It will make that General Sherman thing look like a cigar-Indian."

"I don't care what you do to that old villain," said April, with an inherited abomination for all Northern generals. "But Mr. Saint-Gaudens is a little above my rank."

"Don't you believe it," said Bob. "You're lots younger than Saint-Gaudens ever was. Go right ahead with your work, and as soon as I get rich I'll show some of these people what a sculptor you are."

"Speaking of getting rich," said Mrs. Summerlin, "have you collected your legacy yet?"

"No. I haven't had time. I don't even know who the trustee is."

"I can tell you all that, but don't be in a nurry. If your money gives you one-tenth as much trouble as ours has, the longer you put off getting it the happier you'll be."

"It's just about one-tenth as much as yours," said Bob, with an abject meekness, "so I'd only have one-tenth the misery. I'd be willing to risk it."

"You're lucky," said April.

Bob gave her a look that confirmed her fears of his humiliation in the discrepancy between their fortunes.

Pansy came in with a new batch of letters sent up by the postman. She greeted Bob as if he were a child of her own raising, while Mrs. Summerlin shuffled the letters over with a groan. Some of the addresses were becoming as familiar as old boresome neighbors that keep dropping in. Some of

these letters were from investment-mongers with a variety of wares to recommend. Some of them were the next installments in the commercial series known as "follow-ups."

Psychology, psychoanalysis, and psychosynthesis, like all other sciences and near sciences, have been gathered in by modern business men who love the big words and the handsome disguises of ignorance or fraud that philosophy affords.

Advertising-matter has just as much right to the term "literature" as any of the other forms of fiction, poetry, and exhortation. In many of the magazines it would be hard to say which of the two sections shows the lesser ability, that mentioned in the Table of Contents or that mentioned in the Index to Advertisers.

Those who maintain that letter-writing is a lost art can never have been caught in the relentless grindstones of the circularizing mills.

Mrs. Summerlin was growing a bit jaded with excess of attention. She had reached the point in advertisement-culture that one reaches who reads too many essays, novels, criticisms, sermons, and treatises: the same formulas had begun to grow irksome; the recurrence of pattern had caused the whole art to be suspect.

She turned to Bob now:

"You're just in time to save us from going mad, Bob. We haven't invested our money yet, and the more we study the problem the less we know about it. Everybody warns us against something, and somebody warns us against everything."

April spoke up:

"I've about decided that the only thing to do is to shut your eyes and take a chance. And you might as well take a long one while you're at it."

Bob was alarmed at this manifestation of the gambler spirit in his chosen helpmeet. He had mocked at Jimmy Dryden's conservative advice in his own case, but he was incapable of approving April's rashness in hers.

"Oh no! No!" he protested. "You've got to be mighty careful. You ought to put your money in something safe and sound."

"Yes, and get nothing for it," April mocked. "What's the use of having a legacy if you bury it in a napkin? No,

sir! Me for at least one good splurge. I reckon a horse-race is about the best investment. You can always get good odds, and you can always get a little excitement out of it."

"For Heaven's sake, don't go mad!" Bob pleaded. "What do you need to have so much money for?"

"To have a good time with, of course!" said April.

It still shocks men to see their nice women demanding a good time. It still seems that a good woman ought not to have a good time; she ought to get fun enough out of a modest home, her own fireside, her own gas-stove, or at most one servant, a husband to mend for and wait for, a church to go to, a placid garden, and in due season a flock of what are somewhat stickily referred to as "kiddies."

Bob, having recently returned to earth from the serene and womanless cloud battle-grounds, was dazed to behold how womankind had changed since he was last in America. As men have always done, he was shocked by what has always existed. He called an ancient thing a new thing because it was new to his ignorance. He had just discovered it, therefore he assumed that his own mother's contemporaries had been innocent of it, as she had assumed of her mother's contemporaries; and so on back.

"Good Lord!" he groaned. "A good time! She wants a good time! What's the world coming to?"

April was not depressed by Bob's despair. She cried:

"Look at old Methusalem! He still has hair and teeth, and he's croaking already. I suppose you are going to put your money in the most conservative thing there is—the Fifth Liberty Loan, no doubt."

Bob answered with shameless nobility. "I got home too late for the drive, or I probably would have. I bought what I could out of my pay."

Mrs. Summerlin said: "We bought several thousand dollars' worth of bonds just to help the country out; but—well, what are you planning to invest in? Maybe we could all go into the same thing."

Bob would not for worlds have confessed that he had chosen the Texas oil crop as his Monte Carlo. He evaded.

"I'd better get it before I invest it."

April, with her diabolic insight, seemed to see through him uncannily. She sniffed:

"He's going to sink it in an oil-well."

The start Bob gave gave her a hint that she had scored a hit, a palpable hit. She drove the point home again.

"Come on, now, 'fess up. You've got a kit-bag full of oil advertisements, and you dream of derricks every night."

In self-defense Bob turned to Mrs. Summerlin. "The girl's gone nutty since I went away."

"I know it," said Mrs. Summerlin. "I can't do a thing with her. You'll have to take her in hand and tame her."

April laughed so outrageously at this suggestion that Bob felt his heart full of Petruchian wrath. He vowed that he would cow this shrew somehow for her own good. The sight of his black menace set her off still further. She was disgracefully hilarious, not the least the lady. She seemed to take so much joy in his discomfiture that she reinfected herself with her own laughter till the tears were pouring down her cheeks.

It is strange how people's souls can fight in the air far above their spoken words, supporting themselves on their own velocity and turning mental somersaults without once touching the ground. When April had worn herself out with her unseemly mockery she mopped her eyes and sobbed:

"Let me know what oil company you've decided to put your money in, Bob, and I'll go halvers with you. The scheme is just nutty enough to appeal to a squirrel like me."

Bob was quite tied up now. It seemed indecent to put his fortune into oil with the idea of making enough money to put him far ahead of April in wealth. In certain aspects, the masculine obligation to be richer than his chosen wife did not look altogether handsome. It would be hard perfectly to justify his choice of oil as the best investment for his own money and his denial of the same opportunity to April for hers. Yet if he let her in on the field, she would either lose her money or, what was worse in a way, get still more richer than he was. If she lost her money, he could take care of her somehow; but if she increased her financial lead over him, he would lose her.

He was in such a mess of quandaries that he did not know which way to turn except toward the door. He was in a rage of resentment at April for having any money to disturb their future with. Why did she have to go and get herself

mentioned in the will, anyway? Most intolerable of all was the idea that his financial activities should have to be circumscribed by hers. Either to go into oil in company with her or unbeknownst to her was difficult now, but to let her keep him out of it by her mere ridicule was to surrender all manhood. He sought cover in dignity, looked at his watch, gave a start, and said:

"I'm sorry, but I'm late to an engagement. It's too bad."

April snickered. "It's too bad you're such a bad actor. But don't let us detain you."

That made it almost impossible to go. April kept reminding him of the old saw; she was just such a woman as he "could neither live with nor live without."

He lavished all his sweetness on Mrs. Summerlin.

"You have my sympathy," he said. "That child will drag all our gray hairs in sorrer to the grave."

And April fiendishly used the only imaginable method of confusing him further. She squeezed his formal hand and murmured with lips as tempting as a rose's petals beaded with morning dew:

"You're a precious darling, Bob, and I adore you."

Bob quoted in torment: "April, I don't know whether to kiss you or kill you."

"Why not both?" she said.

He did neither. He left her. But all the way to the subway he was wondering what a fellow could really do with such a girl.

And both April and he had forgotten that she had invited him to lunch. She remembered it with a gasp and rushed to the elevator. It had taken him to the nether regions. She ran back to telephone the doorman. By the time she got him Bob had left the building. She ran to the window, leaned out, called. But he did not hear.

She watched him striding along and sighed, "You damned old angel, you!" And her tears fell seven stories.

## CHAPTER XI

BOB was in such a state of soul-curdle that he got all the way back to Camp Mills before he suffered that peculiar alteration that we call a change of mind, or a change of heart. As soon as he was in the tented streets he felt that he had been contemptibly rude and perfectly imbecile. He hastened to a pay-station and called up April to perform one of his apologetic grovelings.

April had recovered sufficiently from her heartbreak to eat a hearty (as we say) meal, and she had settled down to humdrum when Bob's voice threw her into the state of frantic discontent known as love. She talked all through his apologies, conveying apologies of her own. After about thirty cents' worth of this mutual confession and absolution at telephone rates, they agreed to meet the day after to-morrow at the Commodore, for another try at luncheon.

This reminded Bob that he had not eaten, and he replenished his stomach at the post exchange. Then he attacked the paper-work stretching between him and his release. For several hours he was a military bookkeeping machine. In the evening he attended a boxing-bout between soldiers who beat the air black and blue and occasionally landed on each other.

The next day Jimmy Dryden tried to persuade Bob to go with him to the Pershing Club. Bob was unaware of this social center, one of the countless amusement factories for the soldiers and sailors.

This club was domiciled in the building once fashionably sacred to Saint Bartholomew's Church, which, like most New York churches, kept building itself statelier mansions, and had now moved over to Park Avenue. Later the building would be turned into a Christian Science church, but for the present moment it was an information bureau, reading-room, rendezvous, and dance-hall for officers of the army,

navy, and Marine Corps. Nearly every afternoon some chaperon brought down a flock of maidens who busied themselves dancing away the loneliness of the officers.

The world had certainly gone a long way in one direction or another when ladies of the highest respectability played shepherdess to droves of young women, corralled them in an old church, and made them dance with men they had never seen before.

Jimmy Dryden emphasized the attraction of the place to Bob, but he was in one of his faithful moods, and it did not seem square to April. But what he said was that he had to finish his reports. He slaved over them all day and late at night, and the next morning set out for New York to meet April.

He was no Orlando to keep his Rosalind waiting an hour. He was thirty minutes ahead of time at the hotel.

A major of ordnance he had come to know on the transport dropped into the next chair. He said he was "waiting for somebody," which meant a woman, of course; and of course she was late. The natural topic of conversation was, "When do you get out?"

Bob said that he hoped to get his papers within a week.

"What are you planning to do when you leave the service?" said Major Brandegee. "Go back to your old job?"

Bob's old job was being a jobless graduate from the V. M. I., but he did not like to confess to such juvenility, especially to a superior in rank and one with the condescending manner of this superior. So Bob spoke with that peculiar majesty of the very young lifting themselves by the bootstraps of their expectations.

"Oh, no! No, no—not at all! You see, Major, I came into a bit of money while I was overseas—a legacy, you know; and I've got to put it to work."

"Ah!" said the Major, interested at once. He had been in cutlery, and he was not averse from (or to) the absorption of some new capital into his neglected business.

"Had you thought of going into the steel business? I know a good place to put some money to work, where it would be safe and sure of a reasonable return."

Bob dodged this cautiously lowered hook, and answered:

"I've about made up my mind to go into oil. You see,

I spent several months in Texas when I was learning to fly, and I feel rather at home in the state. I like the people, too—fine, frank, warm-hearted people. So I think I shall go into oil."

"I see," said the Major. "A bit risky, though."

"Nothing venture, nothing gain."

"Don't believe everything you read in the papers," said the Major, with a paternalism that Bob found offensive

Bob answered with veteran ease: "Oh no—I'm not buying by mail."

"Well," said the Major, "I wish you luck. How about a little drink while we're waiting?"

"I always obey the orders of my superiors," said Bob, with delightful subordination.

"Then we'll report at the firing-line," said the Major.

The two old war-horses rose and moved off to get what liquor the barkeeper would slip to a man in uniform.

Bob had paid no heed to the man in the chair next to his. But as he marched past he caught a glance of the girl in the chair next to that. He told himself that she was *quelque fille!*

April's misbehavior had given him the right, too, to notice whether girls were pretty or not. This one's glance caught in his and let go somewhat as two flowers blown together slowly disengage. Bob felt a slight thrill in the clash.

He had not forgotten it when he came back from the firing-line alone. He noted with a bare trace of regret that the girl was apparently already attached to a soldier, a large, rough fellow, a private, far too homely for such a beauty as she was.

It gave his meditations quite a jolt when the soldier approached him and raised his right hand quickly. Bob wondered if the fellow were going to strike him for looking at his girl. Private soldiers had so long ago ceased to salute officers that Bob was startled when he saw the man's hand going to his own cap instead of to Bob's nose. Bob returned the salute with a wrist-snapping jerk.

"I beg yo' pahdon, Cap'n, but could I ast you a question?" the soldier inquired.

"Certainly," replied Bob, with graciousness enough to spread over to the anxious girl at the soldier's side. The private went on:

"Didn't I meet up with you down in Texas, suh?"

"I was there," said Bob, wishing the wretch would have the presence of mind to introduce the queen at his elbow. The private grinned and turned to his girl:

"Didn't I tell you? I nevah forget a face. Hit was in the Rice Hotel at Houston, wasn't it, suh?"

"I was there several times," said Bob.

"You don't reco'nize me, I reckon, because I didn't have a unifawm on then. I hadn't joined up yet when I met you. I was a gentleman then, and I hope to be again, as soon as I can get my discharge papahs. My name is Yarmy, suh, Joe Yarmy."

"Mine is Taxter, Robert Taxter," said Bob.

"That's the name I was tryin' to think of," said Yarmy, turning again to the girl.

"I think you said Taxta the fust time," said the girl in a voice of amazing sweetness in Bob's ear.

"Of co'se, but I can't trust ma memory since I was gassed on the otha side," said Yarmy.

"Oh! you were gassed. Too bad!" said Bob.

"Yessa, the Huns got me, but not ontwell I'd got a passel of them. Down in Texas we're bawn with shootin'-irons in ouah hands instead of gold spoons. But as I was tellin' Kate—"

Bob was growing desperate. He made a plunge for an introduction.

"Your sister, I suppose?"

"Er—yes, pahdon me for not interdoocin' you."

Bob was shocked to find how glad he was that the girl was not Yarmy's fiancée, as he had feared. Why had he feared? Why was he glad? He wondered, but he could not deny.

There was something about the honest grip Kate's hand gave his that reminded him of Arthur Chapman's beautiful lyric concerning the West and its people:

> Out where the smile dwells a little longer,
> Out where the handclasp's a little stronger,
> That's where the West begins.

Writers of Western stories have always admitted the mystic superiority of Westerners to Easterners. They filled their

stories with Western bad men and bad women, but while these are in the majority in the stories, they do not affect the theory, somehow. Only heroes count.

For the moment Bob was convinced that the Southwest was the heart of the country, and that the soil of Texas grew an extraordinarily high grade of human produce.

In his present mood of revolt from April with her sophisticated New-Yorky ways, her artistic faddishness, her disrespectful habit of making fun of him all the time, Bob found an extraordinary charm in Kate Yarmy's manner. She was shy, constrained, evidently a little afraid of metropolitan crowds and costumes; and yet he felt sure that on her native soil she would be self-reliant, intrepid, a true ranchwoman. She could doubtless ride a bucking bronco to submission; no doubt she wore modest divided skirts instead of the shameless and unconcealed riding-breeches that April flaunted in Central Park or in the Piedmont county fox-hunts.

Kate could probably shoot fast and straight and nip off a rattlesnake's head before he could throw his coil. And doubtless she could be a mighty good friend to a fellow, without thought of evil or fear of gossip. She was no doubt just the sort of pal that a returning soldier needed to refresh his heart and renew his belief in human goodness after a year of foreign war. And all this she had told him in a handclasp and a boyish stare! A good deal can be conveyed in those cipher codes.

Bob was impatient to assure himself of further acquaintance with these simple good souls, and he was eager to put them under an obligation. He said:

"But you said you wanted to ask a favor of me."

"Yes," said Yarmy. "I've got no call to botha yew abaout it, but somehow I said to myself, 'There's one white man withouten even a flash of yalla.' And when I saw you here I said: 'There's my big white hope. The good Lawd must 'a' sent him,' for this old New York is a mighty resky town for plain Texans."

"I'm from Virginia," said Bob. "And my father often used to tell me of the Texas Tigers. He fought alongside them in one or two engagements, and my father said he used to feel sorry for the Yanks when the Texans went at 'em."

"I reckon my old man must have seen your old man there. I was brought up to believe that Virginia was a little bit better than heaven."

Bob kindled with state pride at this gracious tribute, and he repaid the compliment.

"I owe Texas a big debt personally. Talk about hospitality! Texas put our Virginia ideas to shame. I remember a dance they gave at Houston—a street dance, the most wonderful thing I ever heard of. Your Texas poet, Billie Mayfield, got it up. Twelve blocks they roped off, with a band on every block, and all the pretty girls in Texas acting as hostesses. I danced with so many of 'em that I didn't know my own name, to say nothing of anybody else's."

And now Kate found courage to speak up. "I reckon that's why Lieutenant Taxta doesn't remember dancing with me."

Joe was enraptured: "Go on! Yew didn't dance with Lieutenant Taxta?"

"Of course she did," said Bob, and made a handsome lie of it while he was at it. "I didn't feel quite sure whether your sister wanted you to know that she was there. I was hoping to get rid of you and remind her of it."

If Kate saw through Bob's ready perjury, she was too polite or too timid to make it known. As for Joe, he put back his head and roared with a laughter more appropriate to the prairies than to the spacious lobby even of the Commodore.

"Yew tew are suttainly tew cewt faw me."

Bob hastened to quench his ungainly laughter with a quiet, "But the favor you wanted me to do you?"

Joe sobered at once.

"Oh yes! Well, I'll tell you. You see, brotha—pahdon me—lieutenant! Whilst I was doin' my time overseas there was right considerable of an oil-strike in Texas. It came in like a big immense gusher. Texas has had some whoopin' oil stampedes. There was Beaumont and Sour Lake, and Humble, and some over in Louisiana and Oklahomy. But this one beats 'em all, they say. There's been right smart about it in the papers. Maybe you've run across some of the stories."

"Yes, I did read something," Bob mumbled, his heart threatening to knock him to flinders. He waited for Joe to go on; and he did.

"Well, Kate came up Nawth to meet me when my ship got in, and she told me that our little old farm is right in the heart of the excitement."

"Isn't that wonderful!" Bob said. "I congratulate you." And he shook hands ardently—with Kate, thrilling again to the strange, strong honesty of her grip.

Joe scowled. "Well, hit would be wonderfuller if it wasn't for one thing. We're just about broke. The trip Nawth cost a heap, and Kate had to wait several weeks for my boat, and I'm still waitin' for my back pay. I don't want to lose the chance to make a killin'. After a year of the waw, I could use a piece of money, but it costs money to get a rig and bore for the grease. Of course, I could go down to Wall Street, or to some of these curb pirates, and get some cash, I suppose. But from all I've heard, Wall Street is a place where they dehorn us Texas cattle. A fellow goes in a long-horn at one end of the Street and comes out a shorthorn at the other, if he comes out alive at all. And it's a short street, at that.

"So I'm kind of leary about where to turn. I don't know hardly anybody up in this man's town. Seein' you, I thought maybe you could give me some advice about where to look for a little capital."

Bob had a superstitious feeling that Heaven had arranged this meeting, bringing together a man that needed a little capital and a man that needed a place to put a little capital. He stammered almost guiltily:

"How—how much cap-capital would you need, do you think?"

"Well, o' co'se that all depends. I could get a hole into the ground for not very much, but if I had a little mo' I could develop the prop'ty so as to make a big killin'. Kate tells me that several of our neighbors who was so po' they couldn't buy grasshoppas to feed field-mice with are ridin' around now in twin-sixes and talkin' about startin' private banks. The mo' we had to start out with the mo' holes we could bo' and the mo' millions we could make."

Bob was almost suffocated with the glory of the chance.

He heard a call to go down into Texas and commence millionaire.

He grew so iridescent that even the insolent April took on a lovely radiance. He could realize his first dream and multiply his ten thousand by a thousand and return to claim her. She would probably be much nicer to him if he came to her as a magnate.

And in the meanwhile he could be providing riches for this delightful new friend of his. The very look in Kate's eyes was not only a prayer, but an obligation. It would be a blissful duty to help her and her brother to a splendor that would be mighty becoming to her.

And he felt that Kate at least would not treat his ambitions as a joke. She would be as different as possible from April. April would make a fine wife for the plutocrat Bob was going to be. But in the meanwhile Kate would be an ideal friend—a kind of a sort of a sister, something Platonic —whatever that was.

"I think I can find you the money," said Bob.

"I knew it!" said Joe. "Something told me."

He seized Bob's right hand in a burly paw. Bob gave his left to the radiant Kate. He apologized rather neatly:

"Excuse my left. It's nearest the heart."

Kate smiled sibyllically, and her handclasp grew a little stronger, her smile dwelt a little longer.

# Book II
# MONEY GOES OUT

## CHAPTER I

WOMEN long ago learned to accuse their men of many things they never suspect them of. The reason for this is still mysterious to the men, but doubtless it is a good one. It may be an excellently sensible desire to keep their men from even the appearance of evil, lest it lead to the reality.

Bob Taxter had often seen how quickly April could mobilize her accusations, and he was wholesomely afraid of her. He had therefore refused to join Jimmy Dryden and his bevy of girls lest April should come along and accuse him of flirtation. But we walk forever among eggs, and in avoiding one we are always crushing another. And so Bob, having escaped from Jimmy Dryden, proceeded to walk into Joe Yarmy and the pretty Kate.

April was punctual at the Hotel Commodore and sauntered the thronged lobby, hunting for Bob. She did not find him in the little coterie of girls about Jimmy Dryden, and so was denied the row she would have made. But she found him staring into the eyes of Kate Yarmy. April did not realize that Joe Yarmy was attached to the group, and Bob seemed to have forgotten him.

April could not have been expected to assume that Bob was not looking love into the strange woman's eyes, but was boring oil-wells there and thinking of all the money he should make for April's sweet sake.

The primeval woman in April wanted to emit shrieks of preglacial rage and bash in the head of her rival with a club. The 1919 woman in April did not make a sound or a move. She stood smiling in torture, then dropped into a chair and waited.

She waited a long while, then walked slowly past Bob; but he did not even look at her. If he had been flirtatiously inclined, his roving eyes would have seen the pretty ankles in the slim puttees, and would have run up the charmingly

occupied uniform to the head atop; he would then have recognized April, have risen with an instant inspiration, told a good lie, introduced her to his old friends the Yarmys, bidden them good-by, and walked off with April in peace.

Instead, he attended strictly to business, and his virtue had itself for its only reward. April strolled on past in a swirl of embarrassment, chagrin, and wrath.

She sat down again and waited, then rose and walked toward the exit. There she met Walter Reece, who saved her self-respect by his rapture at the sight of her, and begged her to have luncheon with him. She accepted on the allegation that the "girl" she was waiting for had probably gone to the wrong hotel. And she went into the big dining-room with Walter Reece, thanking Heaven that she was not dependent on the false and frivolous Bob Taxter for her entire male recognition.

Young women who go about in breeches and independence nowadays do not have to retire to helpless solitude when their chosen young men abandon them. They do now what men used to do—select consolation from the crowd they circulate in with freedom. That is what April did.

None the less, she was preparing to make Bob sweat for his disloyalty.

And in the meanwhile poor Bob was in a fool's paradise. He was idiotically grateful to the Yarmys for opening the way to boundless fortune, and to Kate Yarmy for promising to line the path with grace. Everything, indeed, seemed to be coming Bob's way.

He was earnestly unthinking all the cruel things he had said of his great-uncle Randolph Chatterson for leaving him the ten thousand dollars he had so vigorously cursed before.

Best of all, the money had come to his worthy self by an amazing coincidence at the very moment of the supreme golden opportunity for making a huge fortune out of a small capital. He had in his pocket several thrilling clippings from that very morning's paper. One advertisement read:

> Mighty Texas gushers roar. Enormous fortunes made by many. Over three thousand dollars made on every one hundred dollars invested.

Bob had figured it out that if he placed his ten thousand dollars here, he would take out three hundred thousand.

This company offered its stock at a special opening price of five cents a share. He could get two hundred thousand shares for his money. That had a nice, wealthy sound. He could hear himself saying, carelessly: "Oh yes! I took a little flier in that stock—only a couple of hundred thousand shares, as I remember."

He had cut out another advertisiment with the glittering text:

Fifty new millionaires! The great oil-fields of Texas have already made fifty new millionaires—and no one knows how many more are in the making. Twenty-five-hundred-barrel well near us; three-thousand-barrel well close to us; five-thousand- to seven-thousand-barrel gushers crowd around us. . . . Twenty-five thousand dollars was recently paid for a lease on a single acre near us.

Yet another advertisement reproduced in facsimile a check for ten thousand dollars as the first instalment of a total of thirty-five thousand dollars from a two-thousand-dollar investment. Even at this modest rate, Bob's ten thousand dollars would bring him in one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars.

The figures made him dizzy. But he kept telling himself that he must keep his head. He had learned this in his flying-machine practice.

Among the opportunities in the morning paper was a note of warning, the description of a police raid on an oil-broker's office; the raiders had found only a few stamps in the safe, and the concern had liabilities of two million dollars. Hundreds of hapless investors were clamoring for news of their lost savings. The dangers were as abysmal as the benefits were cloud-scraping.

Even in the talk with Kate Yarmy, Bob's mind kept shuttling from "Easy come, easy go!" to "Nothing venture, nothing gain!" His heart was throbbing up into his head. His love was involved in his finance.

His patriotism was stirred as well as his mating-instinct. While he was making himself a vast fortune, he could be doing a noble turn for Yarmy, a fellow-soldier, a humble but worthy private who had appealed to him as to a Samaritan. To be a Samaritan at a profit of several thousand per cent.

was charity *de luxe*. The most attractive thing about the Yarmy opportunity was the fact that it was cautious.

The investment of his money in the development of Joe Yarmy's little farmstead would save Bob from the necessity of running the gantlet of the Wall Street footpads and the alternative of putting his money into the hands of some of the advertising stock-jobbers.

Bob was no blithering fish to play the sucker to the first shining bait. He had read a thing or two. He knew that advertisers often exaggerate. There were swindles even in the oil business. He would be nobody's fool. He would not intrust his money to anybody.

He would go to Texas and bore for oil himself. He would take Pudd'nhead Wilson's advice. "Put all your eggs in one basket—and watch the basket." He did not know that the author of this advice had gone bankrupt with a terrific crash of eggs shortly after.

The voyage to Texas would not be altogether uninteresting. While he would have to leave April in New York during his hunt for wealth, he would not be entirely deprived of the refining and congenial influence of woman's society. Joe Yarmy's sister—he had already a warm spot in his heart for her. There was no nonsense about her. She was a good fellow. They would be pals. He would make her and her brother rich, and win himself a sister thereby.

April would like Kate, too. He must arrange to have the two girls meet soon. It was funny how different the two were in every respect. But that would make them all the better friends. It was funny, too, how completely fascinating two absolutely different girls could be.

This many-voiced fugue of rapture was running all its themes at once through Bob's mind. Yet he heard himself saying with a business-like calm:

"Supposing I could find the money for you— I say, supposing—just how much would you have to have?"

Joe laughed with an amusing parody of greed. "Just how much you got, brotha?"

Bob laughed, too. Then he said with a certain magnificence—as if he had tons of money, but was rather stingy with it:

"Would ten thousand dollars get us anywhere?"

Joe was frank: "Well, hit wouldn't get us as further as a million would, but hit would get us ten thousand times furtherer than nothin'."

Bob persisted seriously, "But would it get a well down?"

"Sure it would—two, anyhow—maybe more. Some of them wells only goes down two hundred feet or so and strike oil-sands raht away."

"Well, I could raise ten thou., all right," said Bob.

Joe and Kate received this information with evident delight. Joe said, earnestly:

"That would save us our little farm. And once we bring in a well, we can raise all the extry money we need—easy. But, where's all this money at? You got it raht handy?"

"Well, not exactly," Bob confessed. "I hope to have it in a few weeks. You can wait, can't you?"

Joe pushed his hat back and rubbed his head. "Well, I suppose I could, if it wasn't for havin' to eat once in a while. O' course, ova in France, I used to go for fawty-eight hours on a sanwidge; but Kate—I hate to have her starvin'."

Bob did not like that prospect, either. He said: "Well, I may be able to hurry it up. You see, I've got to see the executor of the will."

Joe's jaw dropped. "Oh, this is comin' to you in a will? Is the pawty daid yit?"

"Oh yes! Poor Uncle Randolph passed away while I was in France. He left some friends of mine over a hundred thousand dollars. They've got theirs already, so I reckon I'll have no trouble collecting my share."

Bob was in a rather uncomfortable position of humiliation. He decided to shift the explanations to the other side. He frowned deeply and said:

"Don't take offense if I talk frankly. But—well, you're a perfect stranger to me, and—of course I'm sure we'll become great friends, but—well, so many wiser people than I am are losing so much money on fake oil properties— You're not getting mad, are you?"

"Go raht on, brotha," Joe said, with fine sympathy. "Don't you take me on trust, or nobody else. I wouldn't do it myself. I'm likely to be askin' you for proof that you got all this money you speak of, so I can't fairly object to your being from Missoura. O' course, though, I can't show

you any samples of goods. I didn't bring Texas up here in my pocket. I can't even show you the hole in the ground. I ain't even dug ary oil-well. If I had have, I wouldn't be lookin' for money up here."

Bob grew still cannier. "But just why do you feel so sure there is oil on your place?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said Joe. "There's a piece of land on our prop'ty that's kind of swampy-like, puddles and cricks and not fit for raising any crops of nothin'. Well, you see, caows and hosses movin' acrost it left hoofprints like. Well, the rain used to stand there—rain stands a long while on the old, black, waxy soil of Texas befo' it seeps through.

"Well, I used to notice little bubbles comin' up on those puddles—like in beer, you know; and now and again I'd put an old tin tomatter-can ova a puddle and wait a minute or tew and then set a match tew it, and—zowy! She'd explode like all-get-out. The old can would go sailin' away in the air.

"Well, I didn't think much of it then, but I realize now that hit was gas risin' from oil deposits daown below that kind of 'cumulated there. Other folks' findin' so many great gushers proves it.

"Man, that old place is just achin' with oil. Why, we had a neighba, a po' old widda woman—Mrs. Durrin, her name was; and Kate was tellin' me— Go awn and tell him, Kate. She knows just how it was."

Kate shook her pretty head. "No use; the lieutenant would only think I was lyin'."

Bob gazed at her with mingled horror and adoration—a rather complicated gaze—which implied, "How can you be so wicked as to think I am so insane as to think so honest a person as you could be so dishonest?" His eyes said all that and more. His lips said:

"Please! I beg you!"

"Well," Kate began, hesitantly, "you see, on the next farm to ours was a shabby old place owned by this Mrs. Durrin, and she had a little old frame shack on it. Her husband wasn't much account, and one day he ups and dies and leaves her with nothin' much except a few acres and a lot of children and some caows.

"She used to milk those caows—sometimes I've seen her

milk twelve of 'em in the mawnin' befo' breakfast. I've seen her standin' up to her knees in mud, workin' raound the place. It was pitiful."

How sweet upon a mouth are words of pity, Bob thought, especially on such a pretty mouth as Kate's!

"Well, when the oil craze hit our part of the country," Kate went on, with a smile replacing her sympathy, "one of Mrs. Durrin's grown-up boys who'd been a rigger for otha wells decided to sink one on his mother's land. She wouldn't consent for the longest tahm, but one day she went away to visit a sick sista in Houston and stayed a week; and when she came back she found a big derrick standing raht where she used to hang out the clothes. Her nice clean yard was all littered up, and as she came neara she saw that all her white chickens and nice, neat caows were dirty and greasy. She was simply fu'ious. She came up close and began to holla at her son, but he only grinned and pointed to a stream of oil as big as a stove-pipe po'in' out. It made a regula lake. She almost fainted, and he had to grab her to keep her from fallin' into the slush-pit. Well, that well brought in only twelve hundred barrels a day."

"Only!" Bob gasped.

Kate nodded. "The first one was the smallest one of the lot. Her boy hired help and ran up fo' mo' derricks, and—well, when I left home, Mrs. Durrin was taking in ova six thaousand dolla's a month."

"Good Lord!" Bob groaned in awe. But this was not all. Kate went on:

"A man was tellin' me that the widda is now worth abote seven million dolla's."

Bob almost fainted. Kate continued:

"She still lives in the old shack. It's home to her. We Texans love our homes, I tell you! She has an automobile—a big twin-six; and she has diamonds, too. But the day I left she waved to me from her porch; she was rockin' her youngest to sleep there."

It made a pretty picture of Arcadian simplicity declining to be corrupted by vast wealth; but Bob wasted no thoughts on this phase. He was thinking of himself as a multimillionaire, and of the automobiles and diamonds he could buy for April.

## CHAPTER II

THE thought of April brought back to Bob the memory of his engagement. He glanced at his wrist-watch and gasped: "Holy mackerel! I had an appointment with—with a friend, and here it is half an hour late. Will you excuse me?"

He could not find April anywhere in the huge lobby. It never occurred to him to look in the dining-room, where he would have found her turning Walter Reece's head. When Bob had hunted the lobby through he went to the telephone-bureau and called up April's number. Mrs. Summerlin answered and told him that April had left to meet him nearly an hour before. She could not imagine where the girl might be.

Bob gritted his teeth in that peculiar nausea one feels who has muffed an engagement and cannot find the other party to it. He went the grand rounds of the lobby again with a hangdog look, uncertain whether April had forgotten or had come and gone in the belief that he had forgotten. Worse yet, he had a fear that she might have caught him gazing on Kate Yarmy's beauty when it was pink, and he writhed to think how he must have looked to her.

He resolved to pursue his legacy and make it his without delay. He put in a long-distance call for the executor, a Virginia lawyer with an office in Richmond. Then he went into the men's café and ate a solitary luncheon in surroundings safely stag.

A page called him from his coffee to the telephone, and he had a pleasant chat with the executor, who rejoiced in the good old Virginia name of Gooch and had known Bob from boyhood. Bob's voice was identification enough.

Mr. Gooch was a rather ponderous and circumlocutory talker for long-distance prices, and he felt called upon to pay a tribute to Bob's military record in the manner of

the late Mr. Addison, an author who still flourishes in the South.

Mr. Gooch terrified Bob by saying that his money ought to be withheld for a year, to make sure that no debtors should appear with claims which would have to be paid before the moneys could be disbursed to the legatees. Bob saw his oil hopes going glimmering. Where would the Yarmys be a year hence? They could hardly wait a week. He explained to Mr. Gooch that he had a splendid opportunity to invest the money cautiously, and after much expensive conversation persuaded Mr. Gooch to mail him a check in full.

Mr. Gooch was really eager to be discharged as executor. He had probated the will, and he was satisfied that all the debts of Uncle Randolph Chatterson were cleared. He had already turned over to April and her mother the fortune that they had not yet been able to invest. He was glad to do Bob the same dubious favor and end his own responsibility.

By the time Bob had won over Mr. Gooch and finished his coffee it was so late that he had to return to camp.

The evening of the next day Bob received a New York draft for ten thousand dollars from Mr. Gooch. Attached was a receipt to be acknowledged before a notary. He went to town the following morning and entered the Fifth Avenue Bank to open an account. To his amazement he was asked for references. This dazed him, since he expected to be received with a Southern hospitality in view of the fact that he came to deposit a fortune, not to draw one out.

He was shocked and puzzled. He could think of no one to name as reference, except Mrs. and Miss Summerlin, and he could not stoop to that. But the cashier ended his embarrassment by a deference to his uniform and to a clipping Bob fished out of his pocketbook describing his citation for valor. The bank accepted his account, took his signature, and gave him a bank-book and a sheaf of blank checks.

When Bob stepped out into the air he paused on the step, feeling like a millionaire with a private mint at his back. He looked up and down Fifth Avenue with a condescending glance and swaggered away. He went into Sherry's, which was soon to close its famous doors forever, and telephoned

to April. He found her out again, and Pansy told him that Miz Summérlin was not at home, neither.

Now Bob felt absolved for a call upon the Yarmys. He telephoned to the number Joe had given him, and Kate's smooth voice answered. She promised to find her brother and bring him along to the luncheon Bob invited them to. Bob wondered if it wouldn't be right pleasant to take a little spin in the Park first, and Kate reckoned it would be. She agreed to be waiting for Bob on the steps of the Savoy Hotel in half an hour.

Bob hunted up a chauffeur and a shiny touring-car and submitted to an exorbitance with the delight of a newly landed sailor glad to be bilked. He found Kate and Joe at the appointed place and supported Kate's elbow in. He told the driver, "Round the Park and up the Drive and then to Delmonico's."

He sat back like an owner and looked over Central Park as if he might buy it. He was saved from this extravagance by the aspect of Riverside Drive. Perhaps that would be a still better place to pitch his tent; the Hudson River would be rather amusing in his front yard.

Kate and Joe could not help noticing that the car carried Cæsar. They smiled amiably at the amiable graciousness of their host, trying his mightiest to be simple in spite of his manifest opulence. Finally Joe said:

"Looks like to me you must have met up with that old executioner and took a heap of money offen him."

Bob laughed with comfortable confusion and nodded, saying:

"I didn't want to get down to business till we'd had a breath of fresh air."

"Fresh air is mahty nice," Joe conceded, "but they's a heap of it in Texas, and I'm kind of homesick for it. I don't like to crowd you any, brotha, but—well, it's only fair to say that sence I saw you last I ran into a certain pawty from my own home taown who is mahty anxious to nick in on this little proposition."

This startled Bob from his lordly complacence. "I hope you told him that I had an option."

Joe grinned in perplexity. "Well, I did allow that you had spoken of it, but he says to me: 'Where's his cash at? Has

he paid you anything daown?' he says; and I had to say: 'Well, no, I haven't seen the color of any money, but he has a sort of a kind of a moral option,' I says. And he says, 'Joe, you must have been gassed considerable over there in that old France,' he says. 'How do you know,' says he, 'that this fella 'ain't changed his mind and bought in on some other property? The newspapers,' he says, 'are simply bustin' with advertisements, and he may have lost out a'ready to some tin-horn gambla.' Of co'se, I said I knew Lieutenant Taxta was a man of his word, but—well, I'll say you had me worried."

Bob laughed in acute distress. He was placed in a corner now, for sure. He must either accept the ugly name of "welsher" or the fool's cap of "plunger." He did not want to draw out at once the money he had just deposited. He liked to toy with the luxurious feeling of ten thousand dollars in the bank. It was a new thrill to him, and he realized that the miser knows a specific voluptuousness denied to other mortals.

The car rounded the cylindrical mausoleum of General Grant and slipped back down Riverside Drive, and Bob liked the scene so well that he felt reluctant to leave velvety New York for the slimy oil-wells of Texas. He fenced with questions designed to clear up obscurities, but really meant to obscure his own hesitation.

The car crossed Seventy-second Street, dived into Central Park, and passed the bulky effigy of Daniel Webster, and still he had not given Joe a definite answer. He felt that Joe was growing a trifle peevish, but he could not bring himself to say the definite yes or no.

Worse yet, he felt a certain chill in the manner of Kate, who sat next to him. At first she had nestled very cozily alongside. The swerves of the car had flung her now and then against him with a soft clash of members that was more agreeable than he dared confess even to himself. But now she held aloof a little; she grew rigid and with her elbow avoided the contact. He realized that she was subtly displeased with him, and he was mighty sorry; but ten thousand dollars was a high stake to play just because a very nice girl was getting huffy about his deliberation, especially as—

He turned suddenly with a violent twist and a backward

gaze. Wasn't that April Summerlin who just shot by? All he could see now was a very trim pair of shoulders and a jaunty overseas cap on a pretty head in a dwindling car of military gray.

He apologized for his abrupt action: "I'm sorry, but —that looked a little like Miss Summerlin who just went by."

Joe's voice softened. "That's the lady you said had come into a lot of money, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Bob.

"You allowed she might be interested in this little proposition."

"Well, yes—she might, but—"

Bob was in a quandary indeed. If April had seen him motoring with Kate, what wouldn't she say to him? How could he justify his escapade except as a business conference? She would be skeptical; he would have to tell her the truth, or she would never speak to him again.

He was afraid of few things in the world, but April's suspicion was one of them. He had faced five Boche air-hyenas with laughter, but he grew craven at the thought of a duel with April's temper.

## CHAPTER III

AS Bob fretted, he heard Joe saying:

"Looks like to me it's up to you, brotha, to come across with the goods. I don't want to push you, but I don't like to have anybody yessing me just for a stall. This man from my home taown means business. I got to take him or leave him, he says, because he's got other lines out. He's got no end of money, tew."

"I see," Bob mumbled in a tangle of ideas.

Joe went on: "But I'll do this much: you put me in touch with those pawties you speak of, and if we get them interested I'll give you mo' tahm, and I'll tell this friend to be on his way."

Bob's heart froze at the keen definition of this proposal. He dreaded to submit April and her mother to the enticements of the oil siren. It was one thing for him to gamble; it was another for them to. The Yarmy plan looked safe and conservative as an investment for his own money and labor; but as an investment for April's wealth—

Still, he had to justify himself to April for his appearance with Kate. He heard Joe saying:

"Of co'se, yo' friends will have every oppo'tunity to look into it thoroughly. Fullest investigation invited, as the fella said, is my motto. If they don't like the looks of it, no harm is done. Otherwise, seems like to me I'd have to link up with the otha fella. Haow about it, brotha?"

"All right," Bob sighed. "I'll see if I can arrange a meeting. Miss Summerlin was out when I telephoned, but as soon as I can get her on the wire I'll let you know, and—well—I'll let you know."

"I can't ask no fairer than that, can I, Kate?" said Joe.

And Kate said, "No." Her arms came out of fold; her elbows no longer fended Bob off, and as the car rounded the next curve she rippled against him with a disconcerting mellowness.

Bob lunched the Yarmys royally at Delmonico's, and Joe asked many questions about the Summerlins, which Bob answered in a troubled wonderment whether he were betraying or befriending them.

He was as honest and chivalrous a youth as could be found in a day's flight, and he seesawed between a gallant desire to be knightly in his love and a highly laudable desire to get rich honorably by taking advantage of nature's wealth and enhancing the future of his sweetheart and himself. He grew dizzy with his perplexity, and finally his various selves agreed to sleep on it. People have a way of tucking other things than bits of wedding-cake under their pillows to dream over.

Joe Yarmy graciously extended Bob's option a little longer, and Kate won him immeasurably by her candid eagerness to meet Miss Summerlin and help her to get rich quick.

Bob went back to camp and found there his anxiously awaited release from military servitude. A large sheet of paper testified that he had been granted an honorable discharge, and another informed him that he was commissioned a captain in the Officers' Reserve Corps.

He suddenly realized the glorious privilege of equality belonging to the citizens of the United States. He who had been merely a liveried servant to many officers of superior insignia was now "an American, by God!" and he could snap his fingers under the nose of a major-general and tell him where he got off.

When Bob had first put his uniform on he had sent his despised civilian togs to his mother's home for storage.

On his return from the wars he had written his mother a long love-letter and asked her to forward his mufti against the glorious hour of his return to civilians. He had also promised to visit her the moment he was free of the army. His faithful mother sent on his trunks, but the unfaithful son had already postponed his journey home and was now wondering whether he had better not defer it till after his Texas venture. Business is always a good excuse for putting off visits home. He wrote his mother that the date of his arrival was uncertain. He tried to be very sad about it, but the important fact to her was that he would not come.

Bob took his old clothes out of the trunks and rejoiced in their colors. But to his horror they proved ludicrously small and threatened to split at many points of tension. As with hundreds of thousands of other lazy American youth, the plain food and complex activity of life in the service of Uncle Sam had enlarged him mightily in body and soul. As with hundreds of thousands of other American youth, his old-fashioned mental and physical clothes would no longer contain him, either. This meant a vast amount of scurry for the political and sartorial tailors of the day.

Bob had learned from other officers of earlier escape that the price of clothes had doubled or trebled since the war, and that it took six weeks or more to get a new suit made, if, indeed, the overworked tailor would stoop to take his measure at all. Millions of men were clamoring for long trousers and waistcoats and coats of rolling lapel. Bob shuddered to think that for a month or more he would have to stick to the uniform or clothe himself in hand-me-downs. Anything was better than lingering in olive drab, and he studied with feverish interest the advertising pages of the magazines and newspapers in which demigods of male beauty were clothed in ready-to-wear clothes, painted by artists of renown.

That evening Bob went about the camp ridiculing such of his brother officers as still awaited their reprieves. He spoke to his once superiors with a smiling reminder that they were now his inferiors. He reveled in the ecstasies of a convict who had served his time and become the master of his own hours.

He absented himself from retreat, and the next morning mocked the bugler who sounded reveille, turned his blanketed back on the subsequent racket, and dozed in fields of asphodel till he was fed up on sleep.

He dressed with a leisure unknown for nearly two years, packed his duds, and struck out for New York, a free man. When he began to price the things he had to buy his gaiety expired. He realized that he was by no means a free man, but a slave to conventions. Ready-made suits cost more than tailor-made before the war.

The dealers who had advertised, "Come up-stairs and save $10, get a $30 suit for $20," now blazoned forth the promise

of suits at the up-stairs bottom-rock price of forty-five dollars.

Silk shirts were eight or ten dollars apiece; silk pajamas were twenty-four dollars a suit; neckties of sufficient gorgeousness ran from three to five dollars; colored silk socks were of equal cost, and the range of choice was small. Shoes were twelve dollars. A standard straw hat was eight dollars, a felt hat fifteen. Underclothes cost enough to be worn outside. And there was a so-called "luxury tax" on many items. But he had to buy something; so he paid like a doleful bride spending her dowry on her trousseau.

Bob went to a tailor to order himself a few garments to his own measure. Before the war the next-to-the-best tailors charged fifty-six dollars for a fine sack suit. Now the tailor offered Bob a great bargain at one hundred and fifty dollars if he would order at once before the next lift of price and the recurrence of the intermittent strike fever. Furthermore, if Bob ordered at once, he could get his suit in a hurry—only five weeks or so.

Bob commanded two suits—one for day and one for night—hoping to have enough left of his ten thousand to pay for them when they were ready. Then he went and bought himself a ready-to-wear business suit and a dinner-jacket and trousers and waistcoat for immediate evenings.

## CHAPTER IV

IT was indeed April whom Bob had seen scudding past his car in Central Park! She had been delivering a trio of soldiers with variegated disablements to an up-town training-school. Returning for more, she saw Bob first, and her car swayed as she gripped the wheel in horror at the sight of him staring once more into the eyes of that creature she had seen him staring at in the hotel.

Her indignant foot had stepped hard on the gas, and she had shot by him as if she were the fugitive from justice and not he. Her heart sickened in her breast at the thought of Bob's disloyalty, and it took all her courage to keep her from swooning like a disprized heroine of Victorian fiction. She reminded herself that she was a sergeant in the military, and drove manfully to her destination.

Still, for all her uniform, she was a lovelorn martyr to the penitential fires of jealousy, and she could not even decide whether she ought to discard Bob as a worthless traitor or fight for him as a prize too precious to be left to any other woman.

She kept at her tasks and finished the day and her own resources of courage together. Before she went home she put in a request for her discharge from the Motor Corps. She could not fight for Bob or against him with the handicap of one uniform and a schedule of hours arranged by her superiors. Her she-captain informed her that there was a great parade on the second day, and that she must make it.

She reached home in a state of mental, physical, and spiritual collapse. She found her mother, as usual, reading the circulars of advertisement solicitors. Mrs. Summerlin glanced over her spectacles to ask:

"Have a hard day, honey?"

"Ghastly! I saw Bob in the Park—in a motor with a creature—"

"In a meature with a crotor! Did you speak to him?"

"Speak to him! Humph! He was too busy even to see me! He was simply plastered to the eyes of that woman."

"A woman! You don't think he's lost his head?"

"He never had a head, but his heart's gone, I reckon."

"Now, April, don't go jumping at conclusions."

"She was a right pretty girl, too. Men would call her pretty. I shouldn't, though. She looked rather—well, hardly what I'd call—nice."

Mrs. Summerlin struggled to her feet only to sit down again.

"April! Where do you get such ideas? Don't speak of such things!"

"You're right. I won't."

"No, I don't mean that. Tell me more about it."

"I'd rather not. I'll wait till Bob comes round with an explanation—if he can make one up."

And then she climbed the stairs to dress for dinner, for the Motor Corps women were permitted to resume their swan's-downs after sunset.

Walter Reece telephoned to ask April to go to the theater or the movies or a dance with him, but she pleaded another engagement. She wanted to stay at home and make the most of her misery. She dawdled about her statuary and mused upon the figure of Bob that she had begun. She mocked the impulse that had led her to idealize him—almost to idolize him—as a winged angel in aviator's togs. For a while she stood with a lump of clay in her palm, and, snatching off little tufts of it, threw them at the statue to light where they would. She felt an impulse to indulge in the ancient practices of witchcraft and stick pins into the image so that Bob might writhe with unexplained pangs. Maeterlinck was reviving the belief in such things, and explaining them simply and plausibly as the result of "odic effluvia." Anything can be explained if you only get a new phrase for it.

At last, with a groan of rage, more at herself for loving him than at Bob for being worthless of her love, April seized the clay wings and broke them from his shoulder-blades and flung them down.

## CHAPTER V

THE next morning April thrust her weary arms and legs into her uniform and fastened on her puttees like one of the Roman sportswomen that Juvenal derided for wearing greaves. Her overseas cap weighed her down like a helmet. She wanted to be a woman again and have the privilege of hysterics.

Along about lunch-time she was called to the headquarters telephone. She was so amazed to hear Bob's voice fuming from the rubber chalice that, before she could remember her grudges, she had greeted him with a cry of welcome.

"I got your number from your mother," Bob said, in a tone of sunlit honey. "I want you to see me in civilian's clothes. I've just been ready-mading myself to death, and you'd never know me."

April's curiosity overpowered her. "Come round here at once," she said, "and give the Motor Corps a good laugh."

"No, you're coming to lunch with me."

"The next time I accept an invitation from you, young man, I'll bring some sandwiches. You never keep your dates."

"Don't I, though? I was half an hour ahead of time yesterday, and hunted all over the hotel for you."

"Did you expect to find me inside the eyes of that flapper you were ogling?"

"What's that?"

"Oh, you heard me! And I saw you! I passed right by you, but you were sunk—completely sunk."

"Now, April! We were talking about you all the time."

April's mocking laughter hurt his ears and her heart. But she consented to take lunch with him provided he called for her at the headquarters. She was on the steps and watched him swinging along in clothes that were eclectic of design.

He was an entirely different Bob from the one she had seen in uniform. She suffered a shock of disillusion, as millions of other women did. There were broken engagements by the hundred, and many a war-marriage ended in divorce when the habiliments of valor came off and the prosaic garments of citizenship went on.

They went to the Biltmore, and Bob lost further luster in the mob of uniforms. The whole world was uncomfortable in its transition phase between war and peace. Nothing was adjusted yet.

The aftermath of glory and the foremath of peace would not blend. President Wilson was in France. The nation had been wallowing along in the trough of a sea of politics without a pilot. The country had forgotten that it had a President for any other purpose than discussion. The Senators and Congressmen at home were furious because the treaty in which they were partners was being drawn up overseas without consulting them or inviting their advice. Returning soldiers brought back disheartening prejudices against the Allies and against their own officers. The League of Nations was a topic of eternal war. The believers of it upheld it as a guaranty of perpetual peace, and at the same time disturbed the peace by bearing false witness against the unconverted. They called the disbelievers fiends and Judases and lovers of blood; the disbelievers called the believers traitors to Washington and Monroe, guarantors of warfare and fanatics of internationalism.

Silly dreamers, forever looking forward into visions instead of backward into experience, were waking with a morning-after taste in their mouths. They had proclaimed that the world would be purged of its dross by its passage through the fire, that the majestic self-forgetfulness displayed in war would remain as a habit of mind when peace was established. And now the only result of the war seemed to be ruins, graves, wounds, high prices, and low ideals. Everybody saw everybody else snatching selfishly at the same old prizes; life was once more a grab-bag of opportunities.

April felt a suspicion of change in Bob. He who had waited months for a chance at battle grew furious at having to wait a few minutes for a table. He who had lived on filthy grub, and little of it, with relish found nothing fit to eat on

a Biltmore bill of fare. He wanted to wring the neck of a waiter, who had also been a soldier, for not striking the speed of a quick-lunch room.

April noted that Bob seemed to defer the subject of the woman he was with. She broached the matter herself at last. "You were going to tell me about that girl, Bob."

He said, "Oh yes!" with what she assumed to be a guilty start.

He had been trying for some time to arrange a good beginning for his story, and April caught him unready. He bolted into the midst of things.

"Well, you see, this Joe Yarmy—"

"Oh! you call her Joe already?"

"Call who Joe?"

"This girl."

"I was speaking of her brother!"

"Oh! she has a brother!"

"Of course she has."

"I'm supposed to know that, then."

"You're supposed to let me tell this my own way."

"Oh! It's as complicated as all that, is it? Well, go on and tell it your own way."

"It's not complicated at all."

"Then why are you so touchy about it?"

"It's not me that's touchy; it's you."

"Oh! now I'm to blame—as usual!"

"My God! April, will you never grow up? You're as impossible as you were when you were five years old."

"Oh, forgive me, Mr. Possible! If I'm so impossible, and have always been, why do you bother with me at all?"

"I don't know, unless it's because I've been cursed from my cradle with loving you."

This melted her a little. She laughed and said: "Well, go on. Her brother Joe—"

The waiter interpolated a few dishes and took away a few while Bob gnashed his teeth. When this third person moved off Bob began anew:

"The other day a soldier named Joe Yarmy came up to me and asked my advice."

"Why did he pick on you?"

"Because he had met me in Texas when I was learning to fly there."

"And had you met his sister there, too?"

"No. Well, yes—at least, she said I had danced with her at the big street-dance in Houston."

"Oh! you were dancing in Texas, were you? I don't remember you writing me about any dancing."

"It was probably during one of the times when we were not writing," Bob groaned; then he struck out viciously. "It was just about the time, I reckon, when you were going to marry that Major What's-his-name."

In fighting with a woman a man should never hit her. His whole duty is to run away and dodge until she is tired out; then, if she loves him, she will surrender to him and accept his apologies for her bad temper. April's entirely unfair answer to Bob's very palpable hit was to say with demoniac cleverness:

"Oh, you were revenging yourself on me by flirting with another girl? I see! Quite proper! Go on."

Bob simply would not have this. He pushed away with disgust an exceedingly toothsome brochette of chicken livers, and shook his head in despair. His temper told him to hurl the table over and run amuck through the restaurant, screaming curses. But his breeding told him that this luxury was denied him. He said, very quietly:

"Since you know the whole story, write it yourself. You'll get no more out of me."

Then he dragged the chicken livers back and devoured them with a ferocity that could have chewed up the steel skewer and never noticed it.

April pecked daintily with her fork at an *omelette aux fines herbes* and laughed the while a low mocking gurgle that threatened Bob's sanity. For the waiter's sake they finished the meal with decorum. Bob called for the check, tried not to look the astonishment he felt at the munificence of the price for the modest repast, and paid it with liberal usury for the waiter, and they strolled out of the room, trying to act as if their hearts were not debating between murder and suicide.

Bob called up a taxi. April said:

"I'd prefer to walk, if you don't mind."

Bob countermanded the taxi and walked. When they reached April's headquarters she said:

"Good-by."

He groaned. "Shall I see you again?"

She laughed. "You know the address!" and left him.

He saluted before he realized that he no longer wore an overseas cap; then he lifted his hat and walked away in a wrath all the blacker because the whole quarrel was so infamously silly. He had forgotten to arrange the meeting with Kate, and he was glad of it.

He did not know that April was peering out of the window at him through a rain of tears as she wondered why she loved him so and was so mean to him.

Bob went to his rooms, for he had taken rooms—not a room, but rooms. None of the big hotels could give him any space at all, but a fellow-officer just quitting New York had referred him to a small hotel up-town. At the Deucalion, as it was called, Bob was offered a bedroom and bath, but these seemed so narrow for his new importance that he took an adjoining sitting-room also. He went there now to meditate upon his future.

Bob was in one of his frenzies. He called up Joe Yarmy to tell him that he was ready to close the deal and push on to Texas. The Yarmys were out. He left his name and number.

At some remote period his telephone rang. Before he could check himself he had hoped it was April calling him up to ask his forgiveness. He was all too ready to swap forgiveness with her. But it was Kate that spoke.

Was it Kate or Fate? He decided that it was both. He asked for her brother, and she said that Joe was out and she did not know when he would be back—probably not till late at night.

## CHAPTER VI

IN earlier days they would have said that a devil inside Bob prompted him to propose a little more fresh air. Kate accepted the invitation before Bob could hedge. With a drunken gambler's recklessness, Bob rushed from the Deucalion, beckoned a passing taxicab, and gave the driver the number of Miss Yarmy's hotel, which was also up-town and not far distant. Temptation is usually handy.

Kate did not keep Bob waiting. Temptation is also punctual. She was looking as rosy and guileless as Temptation must to do business. She greeted Bob with warm good-fellowship.

It was a luxury to his lonely soul to sit beside her. The taxicab was a gliding ingle-nook and the twilight was curtains of intimacy.

"Mighty nice of you to take me out," Kate said. "I was going almost crazy, worrying over Joe."

"You poor thing!" Bob moaned. "What's the matter with Joe?"

"Oh, I oughtn't to speak of it, but—well, he got out of his uniform to-day and into his bad habits."

"Everybody is getting out of uniform and into bad habits," said Bob.

"The poor boy! Oh, it's terrible, but—well, he has been drinking. It's the idleness. I've got to get him back home to work. This big wicked city is no place for him or for me. It's funny how much lonelier you can be in a big city than off by yourself. Had you ever noticed it?"

This struck Bob as a very profound observation. Kate was wise, and yet she was pitiful. He felt awfully sorry for her, but proud to know her. Her solicitude for her brother touched him more deeply. He wished he had some nice girl to be solicitous for him. April was always so solicitous for her own rights.

Suddenly, thinking about April, he found that he was holding Kate's right hand in his left and patting it with his right. She put her left hand on top of his and squeezed it gratefully, then withdrew her fingers from his, shyly.

He felt appallingly lonely without her hand to hold. He took it again, and she humored the orphan. They rode a long while with palms joined. They were as ingenuous as the two Babes in the Wood, though they did not look it, there in their taxi in Central Park.

They came out of the Park at Fifty-ninth Street, and the taxi-driver turned round and opened the door to ask, "Where do we go from here?"

Bob laughed, remembering the story a lieutenant-commander of the navy had told him: When his destroyer was torpedoed by a submarine and he had been hauled onto a bit of wreckage, a sailor had swung up from the depths and paused, before he clambered aboard, to salute and say:

"Well, sir, and where do we go from here?"

Bob felt as reckless as that. His future with April had been torpedoed. He was alone on a raft with as pretty a girl. What did he care where they went from there? He turned to Kate.

"How'd you like to dine with me?" he asked, eagerly.

"Just us two?" Kate faltered. "Would it be all right?"

"Sure it would! You'd be all right anywhere!" said Bob, with masterfulness, to her. To the driver he said, "Take us to the Knickerbocker."

There was a dancing space at the Knickerbocker, and after he had ordered a consoling and encouraging dinner Bob suggested a dance. Kate accepted shyly.

She made a delicious armful, and as she nestled to him Bob murmured:

"This is a little different from dancing on the pavement in Houston, eh?"

As she nodded her head her hat brushed his cheek tauntingly, but she murmured into his manly chest:

"I'm a little homesick, though."

"Me, too," he answered, gallantly. "Texas is like home to me. You Texas girls are—well—" For lack of a bright enough word, he held her a little snugger. She laughed, whether at his lack of vocabulary or his excess of cordiality

he could not tell. But she laughed, and so he hugged her a little snugger yet. And now she sighed. And the music ended, leaving Bob strangely bewildered.

They danced several times between the courses of the dinner, and Bob's regard for Kate modulated rapidly, but without shock, from tender friendship and sympathy through an ambiguous mood to a playful flirtatiousness, thence, by way of very trepid advances, to the border of audacity and desire. Kate was apparently too innocent or too sad to resent his adventure.

Bob and Kate lingered and danced after they had finished their coffee.

Bob felt a remorseful recklessness as he sank into his chair, and then it seemed as if April had taken a place at the table. More reproachful than the bloody ghost of Banquo, she drooped in her somber girlhood. Bob was bitterly ashamed of himself. He was a dual traitor to April's trust and to Kate's friendship. But while his soul scolded him for a blackguard, he had not the courage to flee from the unwitting temptress. One finds himself committed to finishing a flirtation as well as a war. He made a feeble effort at an armistice and said:

"I don't suppose you'd care to go to a show, would you?" He hoped she would say that she had to go home. Or at least he hoped he hoped so. But she said:

"I'd love it—that is, if you want to."

"I'm dying to," said Bob, casting his last shred of honor overboard with regret.

He bought tickets at the news-stand. They came high —five dollars apiece. New York was so overpopulated and theater-mad that only an accident left these tickets in the hands of the agency. A few months later New York evenings would be desperately empty, for the great strike of the actors against the managers would break out and rage for weeks, adding one more to the numberless labor agitations that made peace more warlike than the war.

A hang-over from the war was the tax on theater tickets. Bob, who had paid a war tax on all his costly clothes from socks to pajamas, added a dollar tax to his ten dollars' worth of theater tickets. This tithe on pleasure hurt him more than the ten, warning him anew that what funds were

left of his final pay were running low. He would soon have to nibble at the deposit in the bank. It would be wise to get out of this exorbitant town and into the simplicities of oleaginous Texas as promptly as possible.

The play was typical of a theatrical season in which almost all of the farces had beds in them, with most of the characters in or under the beds. The name of this piece was, "Up in Mabel's Room." It concerned the agonies of a lover engaged to one girl and desperately anxious to recover from a previous flame an embroidered chemise he had rashly given her. Underwear had been so vividly and incessantly pictured in the advertising pages of the most prudish magazines that it was bound to reach the stage, which is always a few years late in taking up popular themes.

There is no particular reason for being afraid of underwear, since all decent people wear it, except when they go bathing in public or in private, or go to bed; besides, it is to be seen flaunting on a million clothes-lines. But people have to have something to be shocked about, so, in the year 1919, they decided to be shocked about two of the most familiar things in the world, beds and underclothes. From what childish, homely material do we overgrown brats, never quite escaping from the nursery, construct our codes of morals, immorals, religions, etiquettes, terrors, and delicious naughtinesses! Preachers were going into spasms over the ruinous effect of such diversions—as if they made any difference.

The farce was ingenious, and since things that startle prudery are always twice as amusing as polite wit, the laughter was uproarious. Bob yelped and rocked with the rocking house. He dared not look at Kate, but he could hear her shriek. This shocked him until he realized that she was doubtless too honest to be a prude; then he liked her better for not pretending to be prissy and prunesy.

After the farce, Kate permitted him to persuade her to take supper on the New Amsterdam Roof, where they danced some more and witnessed a midnight entertainment on a platform that came sliding out mysteriously into the room. The new shimmy dance was marvelously exploited by young women who had learned to shiver their skins as horses do. Its origin, according to history, was the effort to shake off

a chemise without seizing it with the hands. It was not supposed to be proper to dance it unprofessionally, but it was considered permissible to watch it and laugh.

On the way back to Kate's hotel, along about 1 A.M., Bob was a trifle reckless; but, fortunately for him, Kate would not flirt. She insisted on talking about Texas and oil-wells so that she might have something definite to tell Joe; and at last Bob told her that he would be ready to start at once, and would draw his money from the bank the next morning. She was so relieved that she gave a little cry of relief and swayed toward him.

He caught her in his arms and would have kissed her, but she put her fingers between her mouth and his lip and whispered:

"Oh, please don't!"

She guaranteed to have Joe sober and prepared to close the deal with Bob on the transfer of cash, and Bob made another effort to plant a good-night on her lips, but she eluded him with a kindly smile, and he left it on the back of her hand instead.

Instead of riding to his rooms, he dismissed the taxi and struck out through the Park afoot. He was in a swirl of excitements.

To be in love with one maiden and flitting about another was not noble, but it was—whew, but it was interesting! It would have been hard to say which really delighted Bob the more, his remorse at his own devilishness or his fascinated dread of what his uncontrollable daring might lead him to.

Youth has peculiar privileges of ecstasy. It has not had time to grow indifferent to ideals and to the beauty of fidelity. It has not learned how dismally the most promising intrigues repeat the same patterns and lapse to the most dreary conclusions.

Bob knew that he was inhabited by a devil, a most perilous yet a most entertaining tenant. He was not lonely, at least, when his devil was turning his brain into a debating society with a better self presenting little but platitudes and don'ts. Better selves are dull company, because they deal in truth and wisdom, two subjects in which few people are interested.

## CHAPTER VII

THE next morning Bob stared at his face as he shaved it, and called himself a low-down hound, a no-account common scoundrel who had forgotten his pledge to the finest girl on earth, and had sullied with his contemptible ambition the next finest. But the face in the mirror did not seem to take the abuse very seriously.

He scowled with his brows, but when his razor had brought away the lather from his lips he found a grin lurking there —a smile that would not come off. He told himself that he was no more to be trusted with nice women than with good liquor, and that he must never go near temptation again. But he could not disown a certain smirk of satisfaction at his high spirit. He was so horrified with himself that he was quite proud of it.

He loved restive colts, and the more dangerous they were the more he liked to ride them. He felt as if a part of his soul were a restive colt, a thoroughbred of high mettle. It might bolt with him, and it might leap over a cliff with him, but—well, it was royal sport.

While he was wondering how many women's lives he would wreck before he settled down, a hall-boy brought to his door a telegram. He wondered which of his two conquests had been too impatient to wait for him to be up and dressed.

He tore open the envelop. It contained a night letter, from his mother.

The sight of that word at the end of the message shocked and humbled him as if she had walked in upon him. He felt a need for gathering a robe of decency about his soul and flinging the thoughts he had been wearing into the soiled-clothes hamper. He felt that he had been cruel as well as evil, and a deep contrition sobered him as he read.

His mother did not rebuke him as he deserved or charge him with ingratitude. She simply said:

Your darling letter received so sorry you had so much trouble getting free and have to go right into business (without any vacation don't bother to come here I will run up to New York and stop with Cousin Sally will wire train later dearest love dying to see my boy.

MOTHER.

The meek tenderness of this was more scathing than any reproach. She had given him to his country and waited the whole war through in ceaseless dread. When he came back he could not spare the time to run down into Virginia to greet her! And she would drag her poor self all the way to New York for a sight of him.

Bob cursed himself for an ingrate and a reprobate and vowed that he would never neglect his mother again. It was not a new vow.

Incidentally it simplified matters immensely to have his mother in New York, for he could enjoy a little visit with her and then rush down to Texas before the multitudes of oil-borers had drained off all the supply.

After breakfast he went to the bank to draw the money to pay for his share in the Yarmy property. The streets were notably thronged, even for those crowded days. He could not get to Fifth Avenue, not to say across it. He had to climb down into the subway at Grand Central Station and ride across beneath the level to Times Square, climb out again and walk back to Sixth Avenue.

West Forty-fourth Street was bottled up with people who could not squeeze into the dense mob along the Avenue. Bob had to thread his way slowly and squirmily through the massed flesh to the front door of the bank. And then he found it closed for the holiday!

He took advantage of the post on the steps that he had obtained by false pretenses and remained put. It was always excusable for one to cheat a crowd of strangers.

The occasion of the holiday and the mob was the parade of the Twenty-seventh Division just in from France. It was made up of New York National Guardsmen, and the metropolis had a village affection for it.

At length a sonorous music proclaimed the approach of the troops. They had been delayed in their passage through the unmanageable multitudes at the Victory Arch. At their head rode Major-General O'Ryan, who had fought for the

National Guard through years of discouragement and had succeeded in getting past innumerable obstacles to his opportunity in France. He and his men had been with the British under Haig and had helped crack the Hindenburg line.

The soldiers were in their own home town now, and each of the regiments had its partizans. They were all strangers to Bob, but he felt the pride of country. Tears flooded his eyes at the sight of the vast banner with its constellation of gold stars, each gleaming for a boy left dead in France.

When the regiments had passed, one after another, an army of wounded followed in an almost endless flow of automobiles three abreast. In the front seat of each car sat two women in uniform. They all looked incredibly smart in their Motor Corps blouses. There were hundreds of them, and they could not conceal the rapture they felt in being a part of the victorious army.

It seemed as if all the maidens of New York had formed a Panathenaic procession. Bob's expert eyes appraised them according to his standards of beauty.

Suddenly he recognized April. His heart leaped with love of her. He had never seen her look so attractive. The wounded men in the back seat seemed to be proud of their chauffeuse. She checked the car abruptly as an imbecile woman with a fringe of children darted across the Avenue. She shot the car forward to keep the alinement.

Bob stared after her with devout eyes. Love came back in a flood. His frivolous courtship of Kate startled his memory and left a grimace of shame that hurt. He saw how wretched a thing it is to deal lightly with love and faith, to juggle hearts and gamble with ideals.

He consecrated himself anew to April. He cast aside even his pitiful little yearning to get richer than she. He resolved to give her a chance at the Yarmy investment. As soon as he could escape from the crowd he telephoned to the Yarmys that the bank was closed.

If he had not seen April he would have called on Miss Yarmy. But he remembered that he was not to be trusted with temptation, and he kept his distance. He tried to telephone to April and beg her to receive his prodigal heart again, but she was away all day, and when he called her by

wire in the evening he learned that she had gone out to dinner.

As he languished in an almost unbearable exile Kate Yarmy telephoned him and implied that she was alone and would be glad to talk with him. Her voice had a wistful appeal in it and a loneliness that woke a fellow-feeling. But he was honorable enough to lie out of the opportunity, alleging an unbreakable engagement.

He suffered such ridiculous agonies over the fact that he might not spend his evening with one young woman and must not spend it with the other that he grew impatient of both their claims on his heart. He asked himself what sort of an it he was, anyway, to be making women so important in his life. Women were a secondary consideration, after all, in any successful man's career—very nice at times for a little while, but disconcerting as a business man's main business.

The next morning he woke up in the same dour conviction. He resolved to bring April and Kate together and let them fight it out.

He telephoned April, and she consented to see the fascinating Miss Yarmy and her brother. He telephoned Miss Yarmy, and she consented to call on Miss Summerlin without waiting to be called on.

To prove that he was a business man and not a lady's man, Bob went to the bank and drew five thousand dollars in five crisp new bills. He was determined to invest it as he saw fit, without regard to April's whims or plans. Women, he repeated, were a secondary consideration to him.

Men are apt to say this of themselves, and to say of women that most of their life is given up to love. This is as manifestly false as most of the popular superstitions.

Women give love perhaps even less consideration than men do. At least, when April and Kate learned that they were to meet in Bob's presence, no attention was paid to Bob, but they thought of each other. Kate was trying to dress herself up so that she would look as well as April. April was thinking of that, but also of the look of her home. She inspected it as if it were about to receive a visit from royalty.

One thing was certain: this was no time to be caught with

dust on the piano and the rugs. She ordered the protesting Pansy to send the elevator-boy post-haste for the vacuum-cleaner.

Pansy was so slow and so surly that April snatched the telephone from her hand and gave the message herself.

"That old vacuum-cleaner man, you know—that I met in your elevator."

"Yassum. Pafessa Taxta, you mean."

"That's the one. Get him here just as soon as you can. I must have him this morning without fail."

"Yassum. I reckon I kin git him."

April hung up the receiver, little dreaming how important a step in her destiny she had taken when she summoned that old darky. She had invoked a genie, an ebony god in a machine and with a machine.

And now the fates began to take a lively interest in Bob Taxter's future, and a grand rendezvous was appointed for its decision. April and her mother, and Kate and Joe, and Bob's mother would all be on hand, and Bob himself would make his usual desperate fight. But old Uncle Zeb would master them all. He had waited long for his day. But it was here.

## CHAPTER VIII

"WHAT shall I wear, mother?"

"Why, you look perfectly lovely in what you have on, honey!"

"But Bob has seen me in this uniform until he's sick of it, and so am I. Thank Heaven, I got out of the service to-day and I can be a woman again. Besides, that creature will be dressed like a house afire, and I'll need every trump I have—if I have any. What shall I put on?"

"Just what effect do you want to create?"

"I want to be very cold and hurt and mistreated and angry and indifferent and ravishingly beautiful and appealing and unattainable and—"

"Put on your blue dress."

April nodded and climbed a step or two, then paused and shook her head.

"That isn't a very late model, though."

"Bob will never know the difference."

"But that woman will. And I want to deal her such a blow that she'll feel like kneeling and imploring me to tell her the name of my dressmaker. And I won't."

These blood-curdling sentiments seemed as natural to Mrs. Summerlin as a cutthroat policy seems to a business man when his son enunciates it. She pondered how best to stifle competition against her daughter's monopoly of Bob Taxter's love.

"That apple-green is ve'y smart. I don't think it will make you look as well in Bob's eyes, but it will certainly put the eye out of that woman."

"Then I'll wear the green," said April, grimly.

People have long expressed surprise at learning that women do not dress for men, but against other women. Yet men do not run their businesses to please their wives; they hardly run them to please their customers; they largely run them to disconcert their rivals.

Men laugh at women for becoming sheep when the Watteau Shepherdess of Fashion waves her beribboned crook. Yet men incessantly copy one another's methods, their shop-fronts, their window-displays, their circulars, their letter-heads, advertising copy, catch-phrases, price-marks, everything. Does one savings-bank build a Greek temple for its new home? Straightway all the other banks must squander their deposits on squat marble houses. Does one cigarette manufacturer take a full-page advertisement in colors? Immediately all cigarettes must have the same blazon. Does one firm send out letters or catalogues in new-art or rococo style? Every respectable firm must fall in line at once.

Women are berated for a willingness to bankrupt everybody within reach in order to secure the maximum of gorgeousness. Yet why should a woman mail herself to the public in a cheap envelop when her husband is sending out his bills and receipts in engraved bond?

The war had put a check on all sorts of businesses and all sorts of vanities. Steel and coal were withheld from unnecessary industries, just as silk and sugar were withheld from unrestricted consumption, because all four commodities were needed for cannon, transports, airplanes, explosives.

But the armistice had taken from women as well as men the inspiration of patriotic sacrifice and the pressure of public opinion, and both sexes were as eager to resume gaiety and business as a widow is to be out of threadbare crape.

Spring and summer led the way. With an extravagance that made the gaudiest shop-window look drab, trees and plants and birds were riotous with dressmaking and every form of adornment. Birds were togging themselves in radiant millinery at a vast expense, and flocking to parties and prize-fights. Plants were spendthrift on new wall-paper and new signboards to attract drummers from the beehives and other luxury factories. The whole earth, having thrown off its snow tarpaulins, was weaving green carpets and rugs of intricate design and deep pile. The cost of it in labor, energy, and heat was beyond calculation.

Yet against the eternal fever of spring in human blood, economists and moralists were prescribing the same old futile pills of advice in editorial, cartoon, and sermon.

Everybody has always tried to compel women to wear more clothes at less expense, and history is strewn with the wrecks that failed. Tyrants have threatened and administered death; priests have prayed and threatened torment after death; satirists have poured boiling oil over the follies of fashion. And none of them succeeded. When the stout Romans with their terrific authority passed sumptuary laws the Roman women stormed the Capitol and forced their repeal. Women do not usually pay so much attention to male protests.

One thing has always dominated their thoughts: unfashionable clothes are a public disgrace. A woman who wears them is in the stocks or on a high pillory. She will not go about branded any more than a business man will carry a sandwich-board stating that he is a failure.

The virtuous wife and daughter feel that they have a perfect right to look as well as the vicious women. Otherwise where is the reward of virtue? And where would the world go if all the good women went dowdy and let all the bad women ply their trade without competition in the arts and graces of delight? But the everlasting vanity of protest against vanity has never discouraged it and never will. Critics are doomed to protest, as butterflies to bloom and frivol. There are cautious and saving women as there are meek and canny plants and birds. But what they call their "virtue" is as much their nature as what they call "vice" in the flamboyant ones is theirs.

The 1919-ers were more excited about the height of prices than about almost any of the other exciting things. Yet prices also were simply doing what they had always done. No war has been so devastating that it has not been followed by hysterics of gaiety, by ballooning of expenditures, and by a soaring quality in prices. Afterward the balloons burst, and all the shopkeepers and labor unions in the world could not keep up prices and wages.

And of course it was not so much that prices and wages went up as that money went down. Foreign exchange shot the chutes. In 1919 the pound sterling, that had once been equal to $4.87, fell away to $4.13; by the second month of 1920 it had sagged to $3.19, far below its previous worst in history. The franc also broke all the records and fell below

seven cents; the lira below eight. The proud German mark sank from twenty-five cents to practical nothingness, and the Russian ruble went out entirely.

It was very flattering to the Almighty Dollar, but the dollar Himself felt like thirty cents in the market. A three-dollar office-boy had to have twelve dollars a week if he were to live well enough to insult visitors. The twelve-dollar-a-week wrapper-addresser had to have twenty-five dollars or the circulars would stick in the mailing-room. The postmen, the firemen, and the policemen had to be boosted in wages or the world would stop.

The policemen of Boston dealt a hard blow to the pacifists by calling a strike; instantly the very hub of culture was changed to a black forest of wolves, while little shopkeepers guarded their own cabins with guns. In Brooklyn two unions of funeral-coach drivers fell by the ears and stopped a funeral, compelling the mourners to change carriages.

Everybody struck—telephone girls, chorus girls, steel workers, street-car men, railroad men, builders. People began to talk of forming a union of the middle classes to strike against the strikers. Yet somehow the world rolled on and kept coming to the same old degrees of the circle that it always touches successively in its everlasting whirl.

Women wrung their hands and wailed at the cost of finery, but they bought more of it than ever. Their men-folk cursed and prophesied disaster, but they paid with the left hand, for one exorbitance, the exorbitance they had gathered with the right hand from some one else.

Pessimists warned that a crash would come. It was a safe prophecy. Crashes always come. When you are slicing bacon there is small risk in foresaying that whatever streak the knife is in will give way to one of the other kind, though it is not safe to say just how soon. The fat is always followed by the lean; hence we have pessimists justified; but then, the lean is always followed by the fat; and therefore the optimists flourish for a while. And so on and on, till we come to the rind and the edge of the bacon. And from where we are, we cannot tell how thick the rasher of this world is.

April Summerlin and her mother were discovering that their legacy of a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, all told, had actually dwindled to a value of about forty

thousand at the moment, and was still on its way down. But the depreciation of money did not seem to justify any depreciation of personal appearance. They still had to "sell themselves," in the trade-word of the day, in their market at market prices.

Mrs. Summerlin must look like a lady of means, and Miss Summerlin must be able to hold up her head among the girls whose business it was to get and to hold social prestige. April would be young only once, and her mother would be middle-aged only once. They were of the sort that would rather die than be conspicuously inferior to their neighbors. This instinct has its value in keeping people good or wholesomely circumspect; and it is impossible to set the bounds to an instinct.

You might talk to such people till the cows come home, but you would not change them. April was as moral and as modest as the average, and that is about all that morals and modesty amount to. If a girl in her nineteen-nineteens had begun to wear the gowns that girls had worn in their eighteen-sixties, she would have thought it perfectly seemly to wear a very low corsage and a skirt like a parachute. She would have blushed only slightly when the wind shifted the parachute so as to disclose to the passers-by the entire columns of her highly ornate ankle-length, hip-height pantalets.

If any one had asked a nice girl of crinoline times to appear publicly in a 1919 Motor Corps costume, she would very properly have preferred to commit suicide. In 1919 April would very properly have preferred poison to pantalets, and no money could have seduced her into parading gusty Broadway in the voluminous peep-show of 1864.

Now that she was leaving breeches for skirts, she would soon be putting on an abhorrence of the Motor Corps costume. She would be appalled at the knee-length skirts that she and her mother had worn a few years back. At the beach she would wear what the majority wore. If it was decided that one-piece bathing-suits with bare legs were to be the vogue, she would go into the water and come out wet in such disclosure with perfect equanimity; and so would her sisters and her cousins and her aunts—also the shy wife of the village parson taking a summer vacation on the orthodox beaches of Ocean Grove, Asbury Park, and the various Chautauquas.

But for the moment, it was not the immodesty of the new clothes that troubled April, though all new clothes are immodest—and all old clothes. It was the blood-curdling indecency of the new prices that dramatized her plans. She paused now to cry out upon them as upon a fiendish conspiracy in the market-place. Everybody was accusing everybody else of profiteering, and everybody was both guilty and helpless.

"The storekeepers are downright thieves," April cried. "I haven't shown you the list of prices I got yesterday." She ran back down the steps to tell her mother of her reconnaissance among the shops. She laid the budget on a table, and the two women keened over it as if they were holding a wake over a dead body.

"I went to Dutilh's to look at some of his importations, and what do you suppose he wants? For a plain serge dress, $225! For a plain cloth dress, $285; for a chiffon afternoon dress, $325; for a three-piece cloth suit, $450 to $525; for an evening dress, $350 to $450, and for an evening wrap, $300 to $600.

"I told him he was a robber, and he said that chiffon velvet cost twenty dollars a yard; the sewing-women's wages are three times what they were; needles, thread, buttons, hooks and eyes, have all gone up. Ribbons are twenty dollars a yard.

"I went to several other places, and their prices were all the same. I didn't dare go into the really high-priced dressmakers'.

"I went to the department stores, and they are just about as high. They used to charge only a third for the same things, but now they're all alike. I'm simply desperate. I reckon I'll have to get in the bathtub and live there, like Demosthenes or whoever it was. Do you remember the story of that poor girl who came to New York to get her trousseau and found the prices so high she decided not to get married, but to go to work?"

"I recall it vaguely," said her mother. "What was the name of it?"

"Oh, the Fourteenth or some other Commandment. It was by—oh, what's-his-name?" April, being normal, did not remember the names of the contemporary authors whose tawdry fiction she skimmed. But she recalled the Catalogue

of Wraps in this book, and she ran along the bookshelves to see if it were there. Nobody had borrowed it, and it was.

April found the pages where a price-list was recorded of a modest outfit for a respectable bride of 1914. It had looked ghastly then; it looked paltry now.

It interested her to set down in two columns a list of such items as could be duplicated. She had been snooping a little among the prices of bride-wear, too; for, after all, she was technically engaged to Bob, and they might suddenly find themselves getting married before they could change their minds again.

This was the list she made from the inventory of trousseaus that scared off the poor bride of ancient 1914:

| | 1914 | 1919 |
|---|---|---|
| Bridal gown | $225.00 | $450.00 |
| Bridal veil | 50.00 | 125.00 |
| Bridal slippers | 10.00 | 18.00 |
| **Gowns and Suits** | | |
| Going-away gown | $125.00 | $285.00 |
| Hat and shoes to match | 50.00 | 62.00 |
| 1 blue gabardine suit | 145.00 | 225.00 |
| 3 morning dresses | 75.00 | 195.00 |
| 1 evening gown | 185.00 | 250.00 |
| 1 evening gown | 125.00 | 185.00 |
| 2 formal lingerie gowns: | | |
| 1 at | 85.00 | 250.00 |
| 1 at | 75.00 | 195.00 |
| 1 afternoon gown of charmeuse | 125.00 | 285.00 |
| 1 dinner gown | 185.00 | 300.00 |
| 1 sports suit | 45.00 | 95.00 |
| 2 white corduroy skirts | 10.00 | 30.00 |
| 2 white piqué skirts | 10.00 | 24.00 |
| 2 white linen skirts | 12.00 | 24.00 |
| **Waists** | | |
| 2 white silk wash blouses | $ 12.00 | $ 24.00 |
| 2 white crêpe wash blouses | 12.00 | 30.00 |
| 2 white handkerchief linen blouses | 10.00 | 32.00 |
| 1 white chiffon blouse | 14.00 | 18.00 |
| 1 pink chiffon blouse | 22.00 | 32.00 |
| **Hats** | | |
| 1 leghorn hat | $ 45.00 | Same |
| 1 afternoon hat (large) | 50.00 | Same |
| 1 afternoon hat (small) | 40.00 | Same |
| 1 sports hat | 14.00 | $ 22.00 |
| 1 morning hat | 25.00 | Same |

# MONEY GOES OUT

| | 1914 | 1919 |
|---|---|---|
| **Shoes** | | |
| 3 pairs satin evening slippers | $ 24.00 | $ 54.00 |
| 1 pair walking-boots | 7.00 | 16.00 |
| 1 pair patent-leather slippers | 10.00 | 18.00 |
| 1 pair white buckskin shoes | 15.00 | 22.00 |
| 1 pair tan ties | 8.00 | 16.00 |
| 1 pair dress shoes | 14.00 | 20.00 |
| 1 pair satin mules | 8.00 | 12.00 |
| 1 pair traveling folding-slippers | 3.00 | 6.00 |
| 1 pair tennis shoes | 6.00 | 20.00 |
| **Coats and Wraps** | | |
| 1 silk sweater | $ 29.00 | $ 40.00 |
| 1 white corduroy coat | 15.00 | 36.00 |
| 1 evening coat, taffeta | 150.00 | 295.00 |
| 1 heavy motor or traveling cloak | 90.00 | 185.00 |
| 1 lace evening scarf | 30.00 | 45.00 |
| 1 chiffon evening scarf | 12.00 | 18.00 |
| **Parasols** | | |
| 1 dark-green silk | $ 12.00 | $ 16.00 |
| 1 rose and ivory | 16.00 | 26.00 |
| 1 white painted chiffon | 30.00 | 55.00 |
| Veils | $ 25.00 | $ 35.00 |
| **Gloves** | | |
| 6 pairs glacé evening gloves | $ 24.00 | $ 39.00 |
| 4 pairs chamois gloves | 8.00 | 12.00 |
| 6 pairs short, white glacé gloves | 12.00 | 18.00 |
| 4 pairs colored suède gloves | 8.00 | 12.00 |
| **Lingerie** | | |
| 3 corsets | $ 72.00 | $120.00 |
| 3 chiffon evening petticoats | 18.00 | 66.00 |
| 2 crêpe petticoats | 14.00 | 24.00 |
| 1 taffeta petticoat | 12.00 | 18.00 |
| 4 white wash petticoats | 28.00 | 46.00 |
| 1 fine lingerie petticoat | 26.00 | 40.00 |
| 3 princess slips for lingerie gowns | 21.00 | 48.00 |
| 1 satin morning petticoat | 12.00 | 18.00 |
| 4 nightgowns | 48.00 | 80.00 |
| 2 nightgowns | 12.00 | 18.00 |
| 6 silk shirts | 36.00 | 36.00 |
| 6 pairs black silk stockings | 12.00 | 16.00 |
| 2 pairs fine silk stockings | 12.00 | 18.00 |
| 6 pairs white silk stockings | 12.00 | 16.00 |
| 6 pairs assorted colors silk stockings | 16.00 | 22.00 |
| 6 crêpe combinations | 56.00 | 72.00 |
| 3 muslin hand-embroidered combinations | 42.00 | 60.00 |
| 1 chiffon tea gown | 60.00 | 95.00 |

| | 1914 | 1919 |
|---|---|---|
| 1 crêpe negligée | $ 18.00 | $ 36.00 |
| 1 crêpe negligée | 12.00 | 26.00 |
| 1 chiffon breakfast jacket | 24.00 | 36.00 |
| 3 chiffon and lace boudoir caps | 17.00 | 26.00 |
| 3 crêpe boudoir caps | 9.00 | 15.00 |
| 3 dozen handkerchiefs with initial | 21.00 | 36.00 |

This was the ghastly muster-roll of necessary clothes for a nice girl of supposed wealth to consider. They stared at it and groaned aloud. It was more tragic than "*King Lear*" (a poor man who had three daughters to dress) and more exciting than "*The Three Musketeers.*"

They were still wagging their heads in despair when Pansy burst in like a little black witch.

"Miss Ma'y," she stormed, "that vacuam-cleana you sent for—"

"Yes?"

"It's a nigga!"

April nodded. "Bring him in and make him hurry."

She ran up the steps and hastened to her room, where she flung off her coat and waistcoat, unstrapped her puttees, unlaced her boots and pulled off her breeches with a masculine haste. Then she began to make her new toilet with all the deliberation of a normal woman.

## CHAPTER IX

IN the meanwhile Pansy was contemptuously ushering into the large studio-room below a very slow and very old, old darky overburdened with the impedimenta of a vacuum-cleaner. The long hose kept slipping from his grasp, and he kept stooping to regain it.

Mrs. Summerlin watched him with the patience of a Southerner for African deliberateness. At last she asked a rather unnecessary question.

"Are you the vacuum-cleaner?"

The old man, hearing a white voice, let the hose flop, and bowed.

"I'm what you told the soop'intendent to send up. Is you Miss Summerlin?"

"I am Mrs. Summerlin."

The old man's eyes whitened with gallant amazement.

"Mrs.? I tell you, some folks is gittin' married mighty early nowadays."

Mrs. Summerlin smiled tolerantly, a bit pleased.

"I understand that you do vacuum-cleaning?"

The darky gasped. "Does I do vacurum-cleanin'? Why, Missy, I—I eats it! I don't like to talk up ma own pafession, but mos' folks says I must 'a' invented vacurums. But I didn't. No'm, I jes' pafected 'em."

"Yes? And what is your price for cleaning this place tho'ly up-stairs and down?"

"When you says 'thully,' does you mean ve'y thully or jest—"

"I mean ve'y tho'ly."

"Well, two dollars used to be my reg'la figga; but sence the waw prices has went up a-flyin'. A vacurum costs abote three times what it did. But I'd work for Southerners like you-all, though, for nothin'—or even less. That's me! Yassum, that's old Pafessa Taxta."

April had neglected to mention to her mother or to Pansy the name of the old man. Mrs. Summerlin was taken aback.

"Did you say *Taxta?*"

"Yassum, I'm name' Taxta. Pafessa is jest ma pedigree."

"Oh!"

There was a hesitancy in her tone that alarmed the old man. He hastened to say:

"If you has any objection to the name o' Taxta, I got others."

Mrs. Summerlin dismissed the point. "Be as quick as you can. I'm expecting callers any moment."

"I'm right with ya," said Professor Taxter, getting into action with surprising agility.

Mrs. Summerlin started up the stairs and murmured to Pansy:

"You stay and watch him; and don't let him dawdle."

Pansy turned, and noting that the black interloper on her sacred prerogative was unscrewing an electric bulb from its socket, charged on him with wrath.

"Heah! What choo doin' thah?"

The old man looked down at the irate little woman and laughed.

"What you think I'm doin'—pullin' a cork?"

"You leave that bullub be," Pansy commanded, putting out her withered old hand to check him.

Zeb pushed it away. "You leave me be. I gotta git the juice that's in there."

Pansy sneered with the superiority of ignorance: "Juice? What choo think this is—a pear?"

Zeb answered with all the meekness of intellect: "This here vacurum needs eleckric juice. It's nachelly got to have it, and that bulb is nachelly full of it."

Pansy weakened. "Can't you make out widout it?"

"I mos' protractedly kinnot."

Pansy was determined to maintain her authority. "Go on—take de juice, take de juice!" she commanded. She studied the vacuum-cleaner with interest. She had never seen one of these electric chambermaids close at hand before. She asked, with pretended unconcern:

"Say, what you got in that thrashin'-machine, anyway?"

Zeb chuckled. "Thrashin'-machine? That's jest chuck

full of nothin'; jes' like me—always hongry. Vacurums is always hongry."

Pansy's curiosity overwhelmed her pride. "Say, man, jes' what is a vacurum, anyhow?"

Zeb was magnificent. "Don't you know what a vacurum is? Well, lea' me elucinate yo' ign'ance. A vacurum—a vacurum is a kind of a—well, speakin' scientific, they's several kinds of vacurums. This is a brass vacurum. You can git nickel-plated vacurums, too, but—well, it's hard to explain in easy words—to a woman. I got it all right; I got the vacurum right in my haid, but it's hard to git it out. Now, if you—supposin' you want to make up a little vacurum, you take a place like this tube, and clean it out till they ain't nothin' there, and then you take away ev'ything that's left, and then you allow the air to 'vaporate. You understan'?"

From the profundity of bewilderment Pansy cried, with all the mental ease of an occultist:

"Oh yes. I understan' all that. But what gits me is how you clean with it. You take ev'ything away from nothin'. That's easy; but how do you clean with it?"

Like many another expert, Zeb was shy of theory. He felt his prestige slipping. He grew desperate:

"How do you clean with it? Why—er—well, how could you he'p cleanin' with it? Say, what business is it of yours, anyway, how you clean with it? Nobody's askin' you to run one o' these, is they? You stick to that mop-rag. That's somethin' you kin understand."

Pansy may have seen through his bluff and been satisfied to torment him. Zeb ignored her as she him. He began to hum a little old song as he puttered about:

> "It takes nine people to hold ma bonnet;
> It takes ten people to hold ma shawl;
> It takes nine people to hold me—
> O Gawd, don't tech on ma waterfall."

As he hummed he smiled a patient, reminiscent old smile.

Pansy halted at her task to listen, and to consider. She started to speak, checked herself, harkened again, then spoke suddenly.

"Say, man, where you hear that fool song at?"

"Oh, I used to know a lady what sang it."

"Lady? What color?"

Zeb chuckled. "She was a kind of a cheap snuff-color, and of the Affican Baptis' pasuasion."

Pansy tossed her head and went out slowly for her pail and brushes. Left alone, Zeb began to look around. He noted a portrait on the wall, the life-size and lifelike presentation of a handsome man in the uniform of a Confederate colonel. Beneath the frame a sword hung on two supports, with a somewhat dingy wrist-knot dangling from the hilt.

Something in the fiery eyes pierced the fog of the negro's dim vision. He fumbled in his torn coat for his spectacles. He found them, rubbed his eyes with an old handkerchief, then rubbed his glasses, put them on, stared at the picture, took off his glasses, and rubbed away a mist of tears that had come suddenly to his eyes.

As Pansy came back, she saw the Professor waving his handkerchief at the portrait and muttering:

"Mawnin', Kunnel! Who? Me? Oh, I'm Masta Taxta's boy Zeb. Oh, he's right well, thanky, Kunnel! Right well —yassa, he's right well—oh, yassa!"

Pansy set her pail down with a thump that wakened the Professor from a dream. He turned on her in a kind of rage:

"Say, huccum Kunnel Beau'gard's face up yonda? And whaffor your lady jump when I allow my name's Taxta?"

Pansy answered the latter question. "I reckon she was considerable put out to hear a fine name like *Taxta* bein' wore round promiscurous by a common Nawthe'n nigga."

Zeb trembled with indignation. "Nigga I may be, but Nawtheren I deny."

"How come you by that name o' *Taxta*, anyhow?"

"I come by it honest. Wasn't I owned once by the Taxtas?"

Pansy laughed him to scorn. "What Taxtas? Not the Robert E. Taxtas?"

Zeb shook like an irascible tarantula. "Who says I ain't owned by the Robert E. Taxtas? I come from the best Taxtas they is—that's me!"

Pansy growled: "Mebbe so. Mebbe so. They owned so many niggas they was room for all kinds."

Zeb could not resist the ironic repartee, "Did they own you?"

"Indeed and they didn't. I was owned by betta folks than the Taxtas."

It was a case of *Arcades ambo*, and Zeb accepted the duel.

"Then you must 'a' been owned by angels; for they nevva was betta folks than my Taxtas."

"What abote the Beau'gards, eh?" Pansy demanded. Zeb made a gesture of condescension.

"Oh, the Beau'gards was certain'y the cream of society! But the Taxtas was the cream off the cream."

Pansy retorted, "Mebbe so, but the Beau'gards was the whipped cream."

"So they was," Zeb lashed back, "and it was the Taxtas what whipped 'em."

Pansy gasped.

Zeb laughed.

"Come on. I'm waitin'— It's yo' turn to speak. Come right along."

Pansy was mouthing the air like a catfish when the door-bell rang. She said, weakly:

"I—I had a good one, but de do'-bell knocked it out of ma haid."

"I've had a lot of them kind, too." Zeb grinned indulgently and gathered up the long nozle of his machine. Pansy opened the door and a bundle of letters was handed to her by the hall-boy, with a laugh.

"More letters, Pansy."

Pansy slammed the door and threw the letters on the desk, muttering, "Mo' investments!"

But Zeb was staring at her intently. He asked, "Did I heah that man call you Pansy?"

"I reckon you did; that's ma name."

She fell to her knees and began to scrub the floor. Zeb studied her.

"Not Pansy Beau'gard?"

"Who else d'you s'pose?"

She did not look up to see how tremendously this careless remark affected him. He controlled himself with difficulty as he murmured:

"I knowed a man who used to be powerful sweet on a little yella Pansy about yo' size and construction. His name was —lemme see—Zeb. Dat's it—Zeb."

Pansy stopped scrubbing, to echo faintly, "Zeb?"

"Um—humm! You evva have a—a frien' name o' Zeb?"

Pansy scowled, and her brush began to rush about ominously as she grumbled:

"Yes. I had one—once. And I wisht I had him here now."

The Professor, smiling lusciously, prolonged the delicious suspense:

"Does you? 'Ca'se why?"

"So's I could souse his thick haid in this pail," Pansy snarled, "and w'ar this mop out on him, and—and—"

"More yit a-comin'?" the Professor gasped as his smile sickened.

"And push him down de elevata-shaf' and drap de elevata on him."

"Golly! how you mus' love dat man!" sighed the Professor as he cautiously moved the mop out of her reach with his foot. "Jest zackly what did Zeb do to make you so confectionery?"

"He run off and lef' me cold—that's what he done."

"Was it long ago?"

"I was young and good-lookin'."

"As fur back as that!"

Pansy rose with the difficulty of many rheumatisms. "It was endurance de Silver War when Mista Ginrul Sherman mowed dat turrible swath through the Sothe and ole Grant come smashin' thoo Virginia. Zeb ran off wid de Yankees."

The Professor hesitated before he voiced his appeal: "You hadn't oughta hold it against him now. You see, he was on'y a young boy. The Yankees come by, an' they kep' sayin': 'You'm no slave. You'm 'lowed free. Git out and be a man and work for yo'se'f.' He says, 'No, I'm gwine stick by Missy till Masta comes back; then mebbe—mebbe.' An' then the Yankees mahch away, flags a-flappin', drums goin' *brrr! brrr! brrr! brrr! brrr!* and fifes whistlin' and evvabody singin':

"Hooray, hooray, we soun' de jubilee,
Hooray, hooray, de song dat makes men free,
Down wit' de traita and up wit' de stah—
Whilst we go mahchin' thoo Jawja."

Perhaps it was the heavy tread of the old man's feet as the song marched him along; at any rate, the sword under Colonel Beauregard's picture fell with a crash. The blade ran from the scabbard and lay naked along the floor.

The Professor stared at it in terror.

Pansy cried, "You can't sing dat song where dat blade is!"

Zeb stooped to pick it up, shivered, drew back, then timidly replaced the sword in the sheath and laid it again in place with reverence, pleading:

"Rest easy, Kunnel. I won't nevva sing a Yankee song no mo'. Dat's de song led Zeb wrong and got him stranded up Nauth heah. They's one I like betta abote:

> "I wisht I was in de lan' of cotton,
> 'Simmon seed and sandy bottom.
> Look away! Look away! Away!

"See, he's smilin' now."

He gazed up at the portrait, and in his superstitious eyes the implacable mien seemed to express the forgiveness he sought.

Pansy, shaken by the ready occultism of her race, felt an old-time tenderness at her heart. She became for the moment once more the crisp young wench that had loved the cub Zeb had been. She groaned across the wasted years.

"Aw, Zeb, why did you go?"

The Professor put out his arms and gathered the old crone in, and mumbled:

"I didn't know no betta, Pansy. I tried and I tried to git back to you, but seems like I jest couldn't. And I was skeered to come back, and I been so lonesome for you I nearly turned white."

Pansy plucked flirtatiously at his sleeve and simpered: "Dog-on you! You still got them same old bunco ways."

Zeb stayed back in the past with her and chortled: "Golly, when I shut ma eyes, I can see you jes' as plain as plain. You always had de little Beau'gard girl with you, an' I was bodyguardin' Masta Bob Taxta, and we was gwine ter marry them two chillen to each otha when we all growed up so's you and me would be owned by de same family. Did they marry each other?"

Pansy shook her head. "Ump-umm! My li'l gal married a gemman name o' Summalin. He daid now!"

Zeb was lost again. He moaned, "Then where is us Taxtas at?"

"Your Marse Bob, he's daid long since," Pansy said. Seeing how the old head dropped under this blow, she spoke with better cheer:

"But he left a young Masta Bob, an' young Masta Bob's sweet on ma Miss April, and they're goin' to marry up with one anotha one of these days."

Zeb shouted, his trust renewed in the life that had tested his optimism sorely:

"Is they? Let it come quick! Oh, golly! I's waited long for this day."

Pansy could never endure uninterrupted bliss. She croaked:

"They's other men hangin' round here mighty persistent, though. It makes me oneasy."

"What men?"

"A blue Yankee name o' Kellogg, for one. And a New-Yawker name Reece. If Mista Bob ain't spry, he'll lose Miss April."

Zeb wafted the menace away. "I can't allow dat. I pintedly kinnot allow it. Jest you wait till I git back workin' for young Masta Bob. I'll marry him to your Miss April so quick it 'll make his haid swim."

Pansy sniffed at such conceit. She said: "You betta make that vacurum swim. You ain't gittin' paid for bringin' on weddin's, is ya?"

Zeb laughed and set to work at last. He turned the juice from the wire into the coil and pushed the prow of his machine about the floor and the rugs with a magic influence that Pansy watched in stupefaction. Zeb noted her homage and smiled.

"Kind o' cozy, us-all keepin' house togetha. On'y one thing needed, and that's Masta Bob. Bring him on, I say, and lea' me at him."

By and by, as if to cover his bet, Fate brought on Bob. The telephone rang. Pansy scrambled to her feet with the chivalrous assistance of her ancient suitor. She spoke into the transmitter. "Tell him would he please come up."

Then she rounded on Zeb, "Heah he is!"

The boastful Professor turned the color of old ashes: "Oh, Lawsy! I'm skeered. I 'ain't saw a real Taxta since his father was a little boy. Whew!" He tried to brush up a little, rubbed his shoes on his calves, ran the vacuum-cleaner about his clothes, and mopped his beaded brow, stammering:

"I gotta be spick and span, and span and spick. I'm goin' to open de do' on him, and I'll say, 'Young Masta Bob, gimme a job.' See! Dat makes a song! 'Young Masta Bob, gimme a nice job.' No, 'job's' betta—plain 'job'!"

The bell rang. Zeb was palsied. He chattered: "It's goin' to be him. It's him at de do'! Oh, Lordy! I— What's ma speech? 'Young Masta Bob, gimme a position'—no, dat ain't it. 'Oh, Masta Bob, please gimme—' Oh, golly! I done been and gone and forgit my oration. You, you let him in."

But Pansy shook her head and pointed relentlessly: "Go awn! Don't keep him standin' outside! Go awn, you ol' fool!"

## CHAPTER X

WITH a mighty effort Zeb pulled his feet out of imaginary asphalt, crossed the room, swung the door wide, and gaped at Bob, who walked in and automatically put out his hat and stick. The staring Zeb groped for them, missed, and let them fall, then scrambled for them, tripping on the stick and kicking the hat across the floor. He went after it like a huge spider, and Bob wondered aloud:

"What's all that, Pansy?"

Pansy was too kind, or too cruel, to seize the opportunity. She prompted Zeb:

"Speak up, man! Speak up!"

The Professor faltered idiotically: "I'm de— I'm de man what cleans de vacurums."

Bob shrugged his shoulders and smiled at Pansy. "I reckon he's been cleaning out a bottle or two, eh, Pansy?"

He crossed the room to the statue of him that April had been making. But he saw that since they had last quarreled over it she had evidently wreaked her well-known temper on it. This gave him so much to think of that he paid no heed to the whispering of the befuddled old Professor, whom Pansy was berating:

"You're what's gwine to make young Masta Bob marry Miss April! You can't even take yo' own foot out yo' mouf."

Zeb explained: "Fo' Gawd, I thought he was the livin' ha'nt of his grandpappy. But he didn't reco'nize me, did he?"

"Oh, he reco'nize you all right. He say you been cleanin' out a bottle."

"Now ain't dat pitiful!" the Professor moaned. "To git de name widout de game." He stared at Bob's back with awe till Bob, turning away in perplexity from the statuette, caught his foot in the vacuum-hose. Then Zeb darted forward, knelt, and lifted Bob's foot from danger, mumbling:

"'Scuse me, Masta Bob!"

Bob stared down at the poll of gray moss. "Why do you call me that?"

The Professor grinned up. "You don't remember me, does ya?"

"No. Where did I ever see you before?"

"You nevva did. I reckon that's why you don't rememba me. Yo' pappy seen me, though, when he was abote knee-high to a grasshoppa."

Bob was used to being claimed by old negroes. He liked to be. He smiled. "Yes?"

"Yassa. Yo' father used to belong to me—to take keer of. I belonged to yo' pappy's pappy."

"Oh, you did! Aren't you pretty far north?"

"Yassa, but I'm goin' back now."

"That's good. When?"

"Whenevva you's raidy to move. You's de gemman what's goin' to take me back."

Bob laughed. "Oh, am I? But I have nothing for you to do."

"Then you gotta git something."

"What would you suggest?"

"Well, you betta lea' me take care of you."

The old turtle volunteered to look after the young hawk. The hawk was rather pleased by the compliment. He helped Zeb to his feet and asked:

"Have you ever been a valet?"

"I been about evvathing that's to be beed. I've valeted some of the best folks they is—outside us Taxtas."

"All right, some day."

"Some day is no day."

"Well, if you lose your present job, come around."

With a doglike familiarity Zeb circled the table, and confronted Bob again:

"I's done lose de job now, and I's come round."

Bob laughed and cuffed him on the shoulder. "You good-for-nothing black hound!"

"Dat's de talk, dat's de talk!" Zeb shouted. "My years is jest achin' for dem kin' words. Call me some mo'."

Young Masta Taxter was somewhat embarrassed by his treasure-trove, but he was game. He looked Zeb over.

"You're a sight, aren't you?"

"I don't do us Taxtas very proud."

Bob took out a vast amount of money and peeled off a fifty-dollar bill with the fresh pride of a new-rich.

"You go buy yourself some new clothes."

The paper seemed to burn the old man's palms. He gasped: "Lawsy, some folks must be settin' up nights writin' money. I'll certainly buy me a trousseau."

Mrs. Summerlin came down the stairs at this moment with a cordial, "Hello, Bob! April will be right down." She noted Zeb and the state of the room.

"Gre't Heavens! haven't you finished here yet?"

"No'm. I been interrupted, and I'm afraid I can't go on."

Mrs. Summerlin's eyes popped with anger. Zeb hastened to explain: "You see, Missy, I belong to Masta Bob now. Ma time ain't ma own."

Bob confirmed this with a nod, and Mrs. Summerlin appealed to him. "Mayn't he finish here first, Bob?"

"Of course! Go on, you lazy pup."

The Professor bowed low. "I was on'y waitin' for orders from de haid of de house."

He set his machine to purring in haste, but Mrs. Summerlin checked him: "You've wasted the whole morning. You'll have to work up-stairs now, till the people go."

"Up-stairs? Yassum!"

While he gathered his equipment April came down the stairs, a martyred queen in manner, but a fashion-queen in costume. Bob forgot Zeb and all other minor matters in his anxious scrutiny of that important face. He did not even notice her new gown, or the epoch-marking fact that she was no longer in blouse and breeches, but in a cubist delirium of colored silks defying old standards of combination.

## CHAPTER XI

APRIL had hardly expected Bob to understand the significance of her revolutionary frock. That was for the confusion of the other woman. But April had supposed that Bob would notice that silk stockings had replaced her leathern greaves and that her ankles and knees had disappeared from the public view.

In fair exchange the throat and shoulder and arms, formerly lost in a military collar and coat, were now displayed under a faint haze of tinted chiffon. The very ribbons and fabric of her nether garb, indeed, were dimly manifest. In accordance with the habit of the period, April was extremely décolletée all around except for that almost imaginary veil which, by a gentleman's and lady's agreement, was accepted as representing the modest concealment that no respectable woman will lay aside before six o'clock in the evening.

Bob may have ignored the dressmaker's genius, but he noted the rosy hue and April's beauty, and he paid tribute handsomely.

"Good Lord, but you are beautiful, April!"

"Praise from an expert—"

"Now, honey!" her mother interposed. "You behave. You're always pickin' on po' Bob. No wonda he nevva comes raound any mo'!"

"I've been terribly busy," Bob explained.

"Ha!" April laughed.

"Well, I have been."

"I know you have. I've seen her!"

"We're off again!" said Bob, turning to Mrs. Summerlin for protection.

Mrs. Summerlin was uneasy, but she was curious to know —c2k, as F. P. A. puts it.

"Tell us about her, Bob, before she gets here, won't you? Is she a Southern lady?"

"Very," said Bob. "She's from Texas. But it's her brother that I'm dealing with, not her."

Professor Taxter, climbing the stairs slowly, had studied April with entire approval and had accepted her as his future mistress. He had been warned by Pansy that April had other suitors; now he was horrified to overhear that Bob's intentions were also held in doubt. He rolled big eyes of anguish at Pansy and found equal alarm in hers. They listened shamelessly to what followed, peering over the rail of the balcony above.

Bob was eager to explain a perfectly natural situation perfectly naturally, but his Adam's apple got in the way. "You see, Mrs. Summerlin, I'm trying to find the best place to put my money. It's only ten thousand dollars."

"Listen to that boy's language!" Zeb whispered to Pansy.

Bob went on: "In a bank it would bring me only four per cent. You can't do anything with four hundred dollars."

Zeb chuckled in Pansy's ear, "I could steal a lot of chickens for fo' hundad dollas."

Pansy motioned him to hush and listen to Bob, who was saying: "I happened on this Joe Yarmy, and—in fact, he asked me for advice. He has a property in the heart of the oil region, and they're making such whopping fortunes down there that I thought I might go into it. It seemed only fair to let you all know of it. So I asked you to see these people. That's all."

Mrs. Summerlin said, "It's mighty sweet of you, Bob; but, after all, what do you know about oil?"

"Not much; that's why I'm going down to find out."

April lifted her pensive head. "You're going to Texas?"

"I thought I would."

"With her?"

"With him!" Bob stared at April a moment, and a flash of wisdom penetrated his gloom. He startled her by saying, "Do you love me as much as all that?"

"As all what?"

"As to be jealous of the sister of the man I'm going into business with."

"But whenever I see you, you seem to see nothing but her. Twice you didn't know I was on earth."

"Twice?"

"Yes, I saw you at the Commodore, making googoo eyes at the cat; and in the Park. You've forgotten even what I look like."

"You look like what I want to marry."

"Bob! Have mercy on poor mother!"

"I won't propose again till I'm a rich man. That hundred-thousand legacy of your mother's and that twenty-five thousand of your own make me look like such a piker I'm ashamed to come around at all."

The word "piker" reminded April of a word Jimmy Dryden had used of Bob. She broke in with a feminine short cut.

"By the way, Bob, what is a gimper?"

"Oh, that's just aviation slang we used in France."

April was still uneasy about that mysterious womanful France. "But what does a gimper do when he gimps?"

Bob's explanation was a surprise and a comfort to her.

"Well, he—he— Well, it's like this. Suppose a fellow goes up with another plane and suddenly five Boche planes jump on the two of them from a pretty pink cloud. Well, of course, they both light out for home— Well, now, suppose the other fellow gets engine trouble, or his machine-gun jams, or anything, then what does the other fellow do? There are five planes against two. He can say, 'It's better for me to get home alive than for both of us to get smashed,' and wave good-by to the other fellow; or he can say, 'I'll hurry home and get help and come back,' and leave him; or any little excuse like that. If he does any of these things he may be very wise, but he's no gimper."

"Then what does a gimper do?" April murmured.

"Oh, he sticks around with his partner and takes pot-luck with him. A gimper is a fellow who would rather die than play the quitter when his pal's in trouble."

April was staring at him through tears of bliss. Her suspicions had been turned to adoration. Bob, who had no idea of what was in her head, asked, carelessly:

"Where did you ever hear the word?"

"Jimmy Dryden used it. He told me that you were the gimpiest little gimper that ever gamp."

Bob flushed with shame at being accused of heroism. He tried to dodge the burden. "Oh, he was stringing you. He just said that, thinking it would please you."

"It does, Bob! Oh, but it does!" April squealed, and suddenly flung her arms about him and kissed him, crying, "Let's be engaged again, Bob."

Barkis was more than willin', and Bob was just about to crush April to his bounding heart when a loud shout of triumph from Professor Taxter made the whole incident ludicrous.

April fell back to her chair in utter shame. Bob's ecstasy was changed to a longing to take the old negro's life. He shouted:

"Zeb, come here!"

He had to call two or three times, and then it was Pansy who appeared at the balcony rail. She leaned out like a burlesque Juliet, and murmured:

"Did anybody call me?"

"I called Zeb!" Bob roared. "What does he mean by watching us? Send him here till I fire him."

Pansy lied superbly: "Why, Mista Bob! Zeb's been in the spar'-room up year vacurum-cleanin'."

"But I heard him laugh."

"Oh yessa. We was talkin' abote when we was chillun togetha, an' he—he didn' realize you-all could year him. You betta excuse him, hadn' you?"

Bob was sure that Pansy was improvising, but he had no documents to refute her fiction with, and he waved her away. He could not recapture April or her fine, careless rapture.

## CHAPTER XII

ZEB, as the *deus ex machina* in this family, began his godhead by as terrible a blunder as Zeus committed when, according to Lucian, he got drunk and, hurling a thunderbolt at a skeptic, knocked one of his own temples to pieces.

April, disgusted by the uncouth guffaw from overhead, felt all her tender impulses turn sour. She said:

"We'd better stick to business talk, Bob. I'll promise not to attack you again without warning."

"Oh, April!" was all Bob could gasp.

Mrs. Summerlin said: "I hope you'll at least give me warning. But these friends of Bob's are coming. We must hurry. Tell us all you can, Bob."

Bob stumbled ahead: "I want you to give the Yarmys the once-over and listen to their proposition. That's all."

Mrs. Summerlin was polite. "We'll be very glad to talk to them."

April was April. "I may as well tell you this, Bob, in advance: any business proposition that involves your going to Texas with such a pretty girl as that gets my no-thank-you right at the start."

"But surely, April, you're not going to let jealousy ruin your life?"

"I'm going to let jealousy do its best to save it," was April's blood-curdling answer.

Bob protested. "But, April honey, a man can't run his business by jealousy."

"A woman had better run hers by it."

"Good Lord! I suppose if we got married you wouldn't even let me keep a good-looking stenographer in my office."

"I should say not!"

Bob mopped his brow and gnashed his teeth. Then he took the bit in them and bolted. He began with a none too original whinny:

"A woman's place is the home."

"Let the good-looking stenographers remember that. Miss Yarmy's home is in Texas, I believe."

"I don't want to be rude, April, but—"

"A man always says that when he is about to biff a lady in the eye."

"Take it as you please, old girl. I'm going to run my own business my own way."

"By all means."

Mrs. Summerlin wrung her hands. "Children! Children! Don't mind April, Bob. But tell me, where is all this oil?"

"In Texas, in Burkburnett County, at a place called Gypsum. Have you got a map?"

Mrs. Summerlin found an old atlas, and it contained a portrait of Texas; and there, sure enough, was the town. Mrs. Summerlin was greatly impressed.

"Look, April, there it is!"

April was intolerable. "Well, what does that prove?"

"Oh, of course, if you don't believe the map!" Bob groaned. "What's the use of talking? You wait till you see Joe Yarmy and see how honest he is."

"I'm more interested in seeing how honest she is."

Mrs. Summerlin shook her head, indicating that Bob was not to notice her. She said:

"We ought to invite your friends to luncheon, but—"

"No, no! I couldn't stop, anyway," Bob said. "My mother gets into town at one-six, and I've got to meet her."

"Oh, isn't that splendid! I'll be so glad to see her again."

Bob had a sudden inspiration. "She has a little money lying idle, too."

Up-stairs, Zeb, listening with all his ears, whispered to Pansy:

"Look's like a lot of idle money's goin' to git mighty busy round year. Jest as I find my young man, he ups and lights out for Texas. I don't like them Yarmys the littlest bit. I don't believe I'm gwine to have 'em, at all."

The telephone rang. Mrs. Summerlin was heard saying: "Send them right up." Pansy slumped down the stairs to admit the callers. They were Joe and Kate. Zeb stooped down on all-fours and peered through the spindles of the balcony for a sight of them.

Mrs. Summerlin was Virginian in her hospitality. April

was polite. Bob was effusive, but completely uncomfortable with the tension of rivalry instantly established between April and Kate. He felt like a shy Circassian on the auction-block being bid for by two slave-dealers ready to cut each other's throats.

Kate was conciliatory in her manner, and frankly admired the home.

"Some diggin's, as we'd say down in Texas! Isn't it interesting, Joe?"

"Swell!" said Joe, eying the balcony. "Looks like it was built by a porch-climber, so's he could practise indoors without attractin' attention!"

"Joe, behave!" Kate cried.

But Joe was frankly curious. He heard a faint purring sound:

"Somebody running a sewin'-machine up-stairs?"

"That's a vacuum-cleaner at work," Mrs. Summerlin explained. "If it annoys you—"

Joe waved his hand indulgently. "It's erysipelas to me."

Bob broke in: "I was just telling about your oil proposition. Mrs. Summerlin and Miss Summerlin are a little doubtful."

"That's what I like to see," Joe said. "Folks that don't invest their money careful got no right to keep it." He turned to Mrs. Summerlin. "The lootenant here says you got some idle money."

Mrs. Summerlin was modest. "Well, we haven't much—only a hundred thousand or so."

"That listens mighty grand to me," said Joe. "After working for Uncle Sam for about a year at thirty dollas a month, a hund'ed thousand dollas looks as big as the moon. If we had that much in Texas, we wouldn't speak to nobody. We'd make it half a million in no time."

April spoke up, "Texas is pretty far away."

Joe nodded and grinned. "Hit's a long ways off, but we got to dig the oil where she lays, ain't we? You can't expect it to come up to New York and spout out of Central Park, can you?"

"No," said April. "But I don't think we could get down to Texas. I don't believe mother is quite equal to the trip. I know I'm not."

Kate was charming about this. "It's a dreadful journey. Why should you take it?"

April laughed uncomfortably. "It's a long distance to send our money by itself."

"Oh, it would be perfectly safe with us," Joe said.

"No doubt," April smiled. "But we're just a couple of foolish, timid women and—"

"I understand perfectly," Kate said, amiably. "I wouldn't go in if I were you."

Mrs. Summerlin did not like this. To have the door closed in her face was irritating. The universal tendency is to try the knob and pound. "Still, if Bob were there to watch it, it would be safe."

Kate poured her beautiful gaze on Bob. "Oh yes, indeed."

April winced at this and said, with some acidity, "May I ask one or two foolish questions?"

"Sure!" said Joe. "Go on and be as foolish as you want to."

"I'm only a woman, and I know nothing of business, but —well, it seems to me, if I had as valuable a property as yours, I'd want to keep it."

"Oh, my dear, we do!" Kate exclaimed.

April murmured, with fermented syrup, "I got the impression that you were trying to sell it."

Kate felt the acid and blanched a little, but controlled herself. "Only part of it."

April was relentlessly sweet. "I'd be awfully selfish and keep it all. I'd be down in Texas boring for oil instead of up here, selling an interest."

Kate could not trust herself to fight with such light foils. She said, "Oh, but— You explain it, Joe."

"Well, you see," Joe began, "a new field needs a lot of capital to expand it, and—well, as I explained to Bob, we're kind of short on cash."

"I see," said April. "Do the people down there in Texas think you have a good thing?"

"Oh, my dear," Kate exclaimed, "it's the talk of the county! That's all, the talk of all Burkburnett."

"And they're all getting rich, I suppose?"

"Rich? Why, poor trash is buying automobiles."

"No lack of money?"

"I should say not!"

April purled along. "Then I should think— Of course, I'm only a woman—but if it were my property, I'd look for money right around there where people knew the field and would just grab at the chance."

This was so brutally sarcastic and insulting in its implications that Kate turned white, then red, and Bob felt called upon to spring to her defense even against April.

While he groped for a rebuke that would put her in her place Mrs. Summerlin said:

"My daughter doesn't mean to question your motives. She's just trying to be business-like."

Joe's temper was plunging at the leash, but he managed to growl: "Oh, that's all right. I don't blame the lady. It does look kind of funny, only, as the lootenant knows, Kate, ma sista, came up Nawth to meet me when I got back from France, and I just asked the lootenant his advice, and it was his idea puttin' his own money in. Am I right, Lootenant?"

"Absolutely," said Bob.

Joe went on: "But, as the lady says, if it's any good, the Texas people would be glad to go in on it, and that's one thing I came up here to say. That Texas friend of mine I was tellin' the lootenant abote is pesterin' the life out of me. He's got twenty-five thousand dollars cash in his hand, and he'll lay it right in mine for a half-interest. Of co'se, if you ladies wanted to go in on it, you got mo' money than what he has, and I promised Bob I'd give you a show. But—I reckon you ain't int'rested."

"I'm immensely interested," said April, with such a dulcet venom in her tone that Bob writhed. But he could not check her with his glare. She went on, "You wouldn't be offended if we asked for references, would you?"

"References?" said Joe. "I ain't lookin' for a job. You know, I've—"

"I mean bank references and things," said April. "I don't know much about it, but I think I've heard that it's usual. Is there anybody we could telegraph to?"

"Lots of folks you could telegraph to, but—well, you know what the telegraph service is like now. It would take a heap of time."

"You would wait, wouldn't you?"

"I would, but ma friend from Texas wouldn't. Fact is, I promised him an answer in half an hour."

Bob protested hotly, "How can you promise my option?"

"Oh, I reckon you don't really want it, seeing that this lady has cold feet on the proposition."

"I'm walking on my own feet," said Bob. "I've only got five thousand dollars here, but—"

April leaped up and put her hand on his hand as it went toward his inside pocket. The gesture and the anxiety mollified Bob's anger a little, but did not weaken his resolution.

## CHAPTER XIII

MRS. SUMMERLIN also felt the charm of a vanishing opportunity. There is something irresistible about a hook trolled rapidly along the water. She said:

"Couldn't you wait till I go down to my bank and—"

Joe looked at his watch and said, "How far is your bank?"

Before Mrs. Summerlin could answer, April said, with all the firmness of an American daughter:

"Mother, I want a word with you and Bob." She turned to the Yarmys, "You'll forgive us a moment?"

"Certainly!" said Kate, with a hurt smile.

April led the way into a little room used as a library. The Yarmys wandered about the studio, Kate pausing before April's somewhat mangled statuette and studying it with a curious interest, trying to make out the artist in the art.

Up-stairs, Zeb and Pansy were holding an anxious parley. Zeb was whispering:

"Golly! I hope Masta Bob ain't goin' to feed all that beautiful money to them two sea-lions. I tell you, I do not desiah to go to no Texas."

"Git on with your vacuration and I'll git to mine," said Pansy, and left him. Zeb set to work glumly.

In the library April, her mother, and Bob were all wan with the tense strain on their every emotion. And nothing puts such strain on emotion as a wrangle over money.

Mrs. Summerlin spoke first: "April, I don't know what's got into you. Your manners amaze me. Why couldn't you at least be polite to Bob's friends? I'm going to put some of my money in this deal just to show you that you can't boss everybody."

"But, mother, I don't like all this hurry. Suppose you lose it, then where would you be? What guaranty have you?"

Bob intervened. "April's right, Mrs. Summerlin. I won't

let you risk your money. If you lost it, I'd never forgive myself. I'll just stake you to a little flier of five hundred off my own pile. If it wins, you get what it makes; if it doesn't, you won't know the difference."

Mrs. Summerlin shook her head. "That's right sweet of you, Bob, but we couldn't accept that, could we, April?"

"Of course not. They sha'n't have any of our money, and I beg you not to let them lay their hands on any of yours."

Bob was aghast. "Why, you speak as if you thought they were a pair of crooks."

"I do!"

Even Mrs. Summerlin gasped at that. "April you'd betta see a docta."

"Well, Bob had better see one, too."

"What on earth have you against them?" Bob pleaded, more for April's sake than Kate's.

"Nothing at all, except that I think the man's a crook and the woman is a thief."

Bob dashed his hand through his hair as if to press his skull together before it exploded. He sighed, "Well, if your jealousy is going to carry you to such insane lengths as that I'll have to fly by myself." Bob started back toward the studio.

"I'm trying to be a gimper to you, Bob," April sighed.

There was something in her voice that reached into Bob's heart like a seizing hand and wrung it. He moved on into the presence of the Yarmys, but his resolution of independence was wavering.

April and her mother followed him, and the Yarmys looked at him wonderingly. There was a long silence till Joe said:

"Well, brotha?"

"I hardly know what to do," Bob faltered.

Kate spoke impulsively. "By all means do as Miss Summerlin wants you to."

If Kate had said, "Please don't listen to Miss Summerlin," Bob would have resisted that advice. He was in a mood to resist any advice, because advice was interference with his freedom of will. He shook with anger.

"No! A man has got to act on his own business in-

stinct. I'll go to Texas with you and look into the matter there."

Joe hesitated. "But I got to have some cash, brotha. That friend of mine is waiting."

Bob drew out his pocketbook and took from it the five thousand-dollar bills. He gazed at them with a parental affection. To make them look more important, he spread them out on a large table. He said with a majestic meekness:

"Mr. Yarmy, here's half of all the money I have on earth. What will you give me for it?"

Joe pondered a moment. "I'll give you a third interest in all we make out of our propaty. We'll share and share alike, I and you and Kate."

Bob waved his hand toward it to indicate that it was Joe's, but April gave a little cry:

"Bob, I implore you."

Bob drew himself to his full height and spoke with lofty courtesy:

"April, I don't want to be ugly, but I must ask to be allowed to run my own business affairs. Mr. Yarmy—"

April drew herself up to her full height and advanced to the table, wrenching from her finger a little circlet of gold holding a smallish diamond. It had not left her hand since the last serious quarrel with Bob before he went to France. She spoke in a pathetically furious mimicry of Bob's manner:

"Perhaps you can buy a little more oil with this."

## CHAPTER XIV

THE diamond glistened like a tear, and Bob could not resist its magic. He picked it up and turned to April.

"Oh, but, honey, if you feel as strong as that—"

Joe spoke up quickly: "I'll tell you. Just to end the ahgament and satisfy evvabody, let's flip a coin for it. Who's got half a dolla? I got one."

He took a coin from his waistcoat pocket and poised it on his thumb. "Heads or tails?"

"Which means what?" said Bob.

"Heads, you come in with us; tails, you take yo' lady friend's advice."

An appeal to the sporting instinct overrides all other considerations, and Bob was full of sporting instinct. He said:

"You can't ask fairer than that, can you, April?"

April murmured, "I don't ask anything at all."

Bob frowned and said, "Go ahead, Mr. Yarmy."

"Are you ready?" Joe inquired, with zest.

All eyes were on him, especially the ivory eyes of Zeb, who hung over the rail above, staring down at the row of bills and at the coin on Joe Yarmy's thumb-nail. Pansy was polishing April's silver in April's room. She missed the epic moment.

Joe sang out, with a race-track twang: "Are you all set? Heads, you buy; tails, you back out."

He snapped the coin into the air. He was so excited that as it descended twirling toward the back of his outstretched left hand, where he planned to catch it, he misjudged. The coin hit his wrist, bounced aside, struck the floor on its edge, ran like a fleet little wheel straight for the divan, and vanished beneath it.

The two men and the three women, in a frenzy of suspense as to the verdict of fate, scurried in pursuit. Bob dropped to one knee. Joe went down on all-fours, and the three

squaws began to tug at the divan. It was of heavy carved wood, and it was hard to budge.

When at last the divan was shoved far to one side Joe sat up on his haunches and pointed to the half-dollar where it lay staring like one evil eye.

"Heads!" the others mumbled.

"There's the answer," said Joe.

"There's your money!" said Bob, jerking a thumb over his shoulder. He did not think to look at the other side of the coin.

Joe rose, helped Bob up, and walked slowly toward the table.

And when they got there the table was bare. All jaws dropped. Ten eyes began to roll wildly in their orbits. Five spines felt the chill presence of something spooky.

# Book III
# HONOR COMES IN

## CHAPTER I

NOW you see it and now you don't!

That is all very well as a watchword for a magician or a spiritualist, but in every-day affairs it is neither amusing nor satisfying. Five thousand real dollars in crisp thousand-dollar bills is no proper material for hocus-pocus or miracle. There was never yet philosopher could endure the toothache; and there was never yet occultist who could accept a magic by which a substantial sum of his own money was whisked away.

Or so, at least, it was with the dematerializing of those five thousand dollars that Bob Taxter had laid on the table and Joe Yarmy had flipped a coin for. If a sleight-of-hand man had made them vanish in the full light, everybody would have laughed and said: "Mighty clever trick. I wonder how he did it." If an old lady had made them disappear in a dark cabinet, nearly everybody would have gasped and sighed: "Marvelous! Trickery is impossible. It proves that there are spirits and that this old lady has them working for her." Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Professor Hyslop and others would have filled the magazines and books with big words about it. It would have sufficed to disprove the law of gravity and every other law.

But the disappearance of this money was really mystifying because it was real money and because none of the wonderers had seen any human being in its neighborhood. Five people were in the same room, but they had all pursued the rolling half-dollar, leaving the five bank-notes in repose. It is excellent cabinet logic that if nobody has seen anybody do a thing, it must have been done by the dead. But this was money! not a banjo or a tambourine.

Mrs. Summerlin's first thought was, "The place is haunted." April Summerlin's first thought was: "Was that Yarmy woman really over there with me? She's capable of anything!"

But even April's hostility could not mistake the sincerity in Kate Yarmy's horrified eyes. Bob Taxter, whose money it was, was simply chloroformed by the shock of the loss. He could not think at all, even occultly.

Joe Yarmy, however, always suspected everybody in advance, and would keep his eye on St. Peter and drop a little acid on the golden stairs of the New Jerusalem. Joe Yarmy, who did not even trust himself, wasted no time on mystic speculations. The one important fact was that he had won the money on the toss of a coin, and that while he chased the coin the paper fled. The situation bored him insufferably.

Bob Taxter pressed his brow and stared at the place where the money had been and whispered:

"It's gone! My five thousand dollars! Just vanished!"

Joe Yarmy rolled a fish-eye at him and sneered: "Your five thousand? Where d' you get that 'your' stuff? It's my five thousand, and I want it."

Bob spoke vaguely, "Find it, and you can keep it."

Joe snarled. "Agh! Cut it out and come across! I ain't time for any handy-spandy jacky-dandy business."

Bob gasped, "You don't think I have it, do you?"

"Well, somebody's got it! It was there, and it ain't there. What you tryin' to put over? You tryin' to welsh on me?"

A flame of wrath blazed in Bob's eyes; he seized Joe by the shoulder with one hand and held his fist at the ready, as he muttered:

"Do you think I've got it?"

Joe preferred his face and health to his argument. He weakened and gulped and whined: "You couldn't have took it. You was on your knees with me ova yonda, brotha!"

Bob let him go and sighed: "It's my loss. I don't get either the oil-property or the money now."

"The oil-prope'ty is ready when the money is," Joe retorted. "I'm ready to sign the papers the minute I get the dough. Where's it at?"

"I wish I knew."

"Then you help me search these folks. Search everybody! You can begin on me."

April spoke up, "You can follow with me."

Kate put up her arms, "I insist on being cleared."

Mrs. Summerlin was terrified. "Gre't Heavens! I wonder if it could have flown over to me." She turned out a pocket and began to feel about her skirts and step aside as if she might be standing on it.

Joe gave her a contemptuous laugh. Her panic was her alibi. But he was furious at the loss of his wealth. He growled at everybody in general and nobody in particular.

"Say! Say! Say! Somebody's gona slip that cash to me quick, or I'm gona turn the bulls loose in here."

"The bulls!" Mrs. Summerlin fretted. "What are the bulls?"

"Agh!" Joe raged. "Thuh pullice; thuh pullice!"

Bob spoke ominously: "Don t worry, Mrs. Summerlin. Mr. Yarmy isn't going to call any police into your apartment."

"Oh, ain't I?" Joe shouted.

Kate gave him a look like a jab with a knife. "No, you ain't I! It would be well for you to rememba, Joe, that you're not in Texas."

Joe subsided. "Agh! Can't you take a joke? I'm not gona make any trouble. But I'm gona find that five. Let's search the place. A draft of wind might have blew the bills off the table."

He led in a frantic ransacking of every nook and cranny. Everybody joined him, and there was so much running about on hands and knees that a stranger who walked in would have wondered what childhood game was being played that these bipeds grew quadrupedal. But the hunt found no trace of the quarry. Not one of the five bills was discovered.

When Joe, still on his hands and knees, turned from looking up the chimney and trying to keep out of the ashes on the hearth, the hum of the vacuum-cleaner up-stairs caught his ear.

He whirled on his knees, sat upon his haunches, listened, demanded:

"Who's makin' that noise?"

Bob answered: "That's my boy Zeb cleaning up-stairs. He wouldn't steal from me."

Joe started up the steps. "Maybe he'd steal from me."

"But he hasn't been down here," Bob protested.

"It won't hurt to give him the once-over," said Joe.

Bob did not fancy the thought of Joe's invading the upper regions of Mrs. Summerlin's home. He said:

"Wait! I'll call him down. Zeb! Oh, Zeb!"

The murmur ceased. Zeb shuffled to the rail and looked over:

"You call me, Masta Bob?"

"Yes. Did you see—"

Joe broke in with ironic lilt, "Come down, sweet evening star!"

Zeb looked to Bob for orders and obeyed his nod. As he clumped down, followed by Pansy, Joe laughed and quoted the song, "'Some folks say a nigga won't steal.' There's two coons here. I reckon one of 'em's got the stuff."

When Zeb arrived he stood blinking his eyes. Pansy took her post at his side, a little less advanced, like the adjutant of a black battalion.

Bob explained. "Zeb—and Pansy—I laid five thousand dollars in bills on this table a few minutes ago, and—well, it isn't here."

"It belonged to me," Joe put in, closing on Zeb as if he would scare it out of him. And if Zeb had had the money on him, he would have shivered it off as his wild eyes fastened on Joe's ferocious glare. With the manner of a policeman putting a suspect through the third degree, Joe roared:

"Come through, coon, and come through clean. We all know you stole that money; so cough!"

Zeb did not mean to be literal. His terror choked him and he coughed. But he did not cough the money. He backed away from Joe's hands to ask:

"You say that money was down year?"

"Yes. You know it was."

"Did I? Well, then, did anybody see me down year?"

"No, but—"

"Well, how's me gwine took it? Does you-all think I'm a jyraffe?"

Joe persisted. "Well, somebody took it, and I'm goin' through you, coon."

Zeb edged away again.

Joe laughed triumphantly. "See, you're afraid to be frisked."

Zeb answered, with much dignity, "I ain't afraid of nothin', but I don't allow no Nawthe'n gemman to call me no coon."

Joe laughed. "Me Nawthe'n! I come from Texas, where we don't stand no nonsense from nigs."

Bob intervened to protect his own. "You didn't take it, did you, Zeb?"

With an honesty that could not be doubted, Zeb raised his right hand and solemnly affirmed:

"Masta Bob, I swa' to the Lawd I ain't nevva laid hands on ary money this day 'ceptin' that fifty you gin me fer ma trousseau."

"I believe you, Zeb," said Bob, "but Mr. Yarmy may not. I want you to let him search you."

Zeb held up both hands now in the attitude of surrender: "Whatevva is yo' desiah is mine, Masta Bob. Mistoo Yahmy can go thoo me wit' a telescope or a X-ray, ef he wants to."

Joe jammed his fingers into various pockets and prodded and buffeted him here and there with no excess of delicacy. Nothing was more convincing than Zeb's helpless giggles as he protested:

"Be keerful, Mistoo Man, you're nachelly ticklin' me to death."

Yarmy flung on the table every object he found.

The entire loot of the raid was an old pipe, a pouch of tobacco, a few coins, a few business cards, a comb, a key or two, a small monkey-wrench, a nub of lead-pencil, a handkerchief, and Bob's fifty-dollar bill. Yarmy was bitterly disappointed, but Bob felt a glow of affection for his new servant who had come past the ordeal so perfectly. Pansy stood watching the search and her welling anger showed how much dearer Zeb's dignity was to her than she would have admitted.

Joe looked at her next. She narrowed her eyes, arched her back, tightened her claws, and drew back her lips like an old cat about to spit. She answered before he spoke:

"I'm a 'spectable woman, young man, and I don't 'low no familiarities. I ain't saw yo' money any mo' than what Zeb has. Him and I been up-stairs evva since I let you in, and you-all just wastin' yo' time foolin' wit' us."

Pansy, like many a more eminent witness at a séance, had solemnly testified to more than she really knew. She had forgotten that she had left Zeb alone for several minutes and had not known what he did or where he went.

When the true explanations are found of these baffling phenomena, they are usually disgustingly simple, and almost always have an element of guile, very loving deceit, perhaps, but deceit.

This mystic rape of five thousand dollars might have gone into the annals of any number of psychical research societies, if the losers had not been more interested in its recovery than in metaphysics.

Uncle Zeb was the god that wreaked this wonder. He had opposed the whole transaction with the Yarmys. During the decision to flip a coin nobody had looked up to the balcony where he lurked.

When the coin rolled and everybody frantically ran to heave away the big divan, fate played the old trick of distracting the attention of the semi-spectators. Zeb stared down at his master's wealth spread beneath him in orderly array. He muttered to himself, "Oh, Lawd! ef I could on'y git ma hands on them beautiful bills!"

His hand, still clutching the long nozle of the vacuum-cleaner, went down toward them yearningly. The motor was running. The machine inspired him. The nozle seemed to be a gigantic forefinger. By letting it down to its full length it just touched the table.

The fierce intake of its breath whisked the first bill into its maw. Zeb's eyes and mouth gaped. He breathed a prayer to the next bill.

"Come on in, honey!" It came.

He invoked the next. "Git to me, baby!"

The next, "Hop along, chile!"

The last, "Run home!"

The five bills had fluttered like little birds into the serpent's throat. Zeb, almost fainting with the audacity of his deed, hardly found strength to draw up the hose. He tiptoed to the adjoining room and set the nozle to the floor, praying that his terror might not shake him to pieces.

That was all. He had not exactly lied when he swore that he had never laid hands on the money. When he went down the steps at Joe's demand he left the money above, of course, in the vacuum-cleaner.

As the magicians say, "Mah-vee-lious! Mah-vee-lious!"

## CHAPTER II

IT was the vanity of his search and Pansy's absolute certainty and manifest honesty that convinced Joe Yarmy of Zeb's innocence. He tossed his hands and gave up with a last command:

"Go on back to your roost."

Zeb paused to ask, "Huccum you-all lef' so much wealth layin' out year?"

Bob explained sheepishly. "We tossed a half-dollar to see whether or not I'd invest in Mr. Yarmy's oil-wells, and the coin rolled under the divan, and we all went after it."

Zeb could not forbear a bit of venerable reproof. "Kind o' funny to resk five thousand dollas on one half-dolla, ain't it? Looks to me like a sign you ain't wanted to put that money in them oil-wells."

Bob winced at this undeniable wisdom from this source. He motioned Zeb to the stairs. Zeb mounted part way and turned to ask:

"Whose half-dolla was it?"

"What difference does that make?" Bob answered, still more impatiently.

"Was it yours, Masta Bob?" Zeb persisted. Bob shook his head angrily. Zeb gazed at Mr. Yarmy and said very respectfully:

"Would you min' leavin' me look at that half-dolla, Mistoo Yarmy?"

Joe darted angrily toward the stairway. "What you gettin' at, nigga?"

Bob checked him and ordered Zeb to go on up-stairs. The old man obeyed his master's nod.

Joe turned to Bob and said: "Well, Mr. Taxta, I reckon that money's gone now, for sure. It's bound to turn up somewhere, but I can't wait. You got another five thousand in the bank. You give me a check for that or come and draw

out the cash. I'll give you a receipt, and then you can keep the lost money when you find it."

Zeb leaned out over the balcony rail to hear this, and April felt a new alarm. But Bob had invested heavily enough for one day. He had lost his taste for speculation. He shook his head.

"No, Mr. Yarmy, I reckon you'd better count me out. I won't decide what to do with the balance till I find what happened to this money. I'm sorry you've had all this trouble, but you won't be out anything, for you have another man waiting to buy in with you."

Joe shifted from foot to foot, exchanged a glance or two with Kate, and nodded his head, like the good sport he was.

"All right, brotha. If you should find the money in the next houah or tew, you got my telephone numba."

He and Kate shook hands all round and took their departure. Since that was all they took, April was able to be almost polite to Kate as she bade her good-by; but she did not ask her to call again.

When the door closed on the Yarmys Bob fell into a chair. April and her mother dropped to the displaced divan. No one spoke till Zeb's voice came down from aloft:

"I wisht you'd 'a' made him show that half-dolla, Masta Bob."

Bob looked up in anger at the annoyance and grumbled, "Get back to your work."

Zeb answered: "Yassa! But you know, Masta Bob, they is money made that has both sides the same."

Bob was indignant. The implication of credulity was intolerable, coming from a stupid old negro. He answered, with some petulance:

"Well, even if it was a phony coin, he didn't make anything out of it."

"No," Zeb chuckled, "de Lawd is mo' powersome than some crooks."

Bob was thinking of Zeb's impudent and obstinate suspicion rather than of his piety when he muttered, "You've been in New York too long."

Zeb shouted at this: "You said it, Masta Bob. I's raidy to go back to ol' V'ginia the moment you says the word."

"We're not going back to Virginia," said Bob, "and if

you don't finish your work up there, you can give me back that fifty and go back to being your own boss."

Zeb's answer to this was a melliflous wheedle, "You 'ain't give me our new address, Masta Bob."

Bob laughed, told him the number and name of his apartment-house, the Deucalion, and then looked at his watch.

"Speaking of Virginia," he said, "my mother is on her way from there, and I've got to meet the one-six train."

Mrs. Summerlin gave him messages of love and welcome for her old friend, and April seconded them. She had often thought of Mrs. Taxter as her future mother-in-law, and had thought well of her in that delicate post. Yet now that she had seen Miss Yarmy, her rival, driven from the field, she felt that her victory had brought her no nearer to Bob.

Bob lifted himself from the chair. He felt tons heavier, relieved of the burden of half of his money; for half of his wings of dream were gone from his shoulders. If April had been far away when he had ten thousand dollars, she had removed to a further infinity now that he was reduced to five. He had not even had the pleasure of squandering it. He had not had a run for his money. Between the mystery and the fact of its evaporation he was too befuddled to think of love or marriage. He was very tired, and his farewell was only a sigh, a sickly smile, and a feeble handclasp.

When he had gone April and her mother turned once more to a minute search for the money. They called Pansy and Zeb down to help in the search, and no one was more fertile in suggestions or more zealous in moving heavy objects about than Zeb.

In the year 1919 there was a peculiar mania for the most idealistic theorizing and for superstitious maunderings employing the logic of the African medicine-men. During the war many of the soldiers went back to the belief in charms and amulets, and to the jaunty fatalism and predestination of Mohammedan and Presbyterian tenets. As Lincoln said of our Civil War, both sides said prayers to the same God for victory over the ungodly enemy.

During and after the war books and magazine articles in floods proclaimed marvels of communication with the dead, of the movement of heavy objects without contact, of thought

transference, of all sorts of new and old demonstrations that the moon is made of green cheese and the air is filled with busy ghosts. These books almost outnumbered all other forms of fiction. Astrological horoscopes were published every day in many newspapers, repeating almost the very words of the Babylonian seers of thousands of years ago. Yet people talk of progress!

Some drew beautiful lessons from the kindly intervention of souls that had "passed over," but came back on call. Others admitted that spirits were at work, but insisted that they were the evil spirits described in the Bible.

The more the accounts of the world beyond differed the more their truth was accepted. Sir Oliver Lodge gave stenographic reports of conversations through women mediums or through tipsy tables that "shook with laughter," and his dead son, identified beyond doubt, told him how they have tweed clothes, whisky, cigars, and even manure in heaven. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, on the other hand, proved that in heaven all people gravitate toward a common age, the old meeting the young half-way. In one of the sublimest passages of humorlessness known to human literature he reassured his readers that they need not be afraid of heaven lest they should have to go naked there, for he had communications proving that the beautiful virtue of modesty was not left behind on earth. Clothes were in celestial fashion.

Heavens, half-heavens, midway passages, transfer stations —all sorts of places were mapped out by eye-witnesses dictating their travelers' tales to earth-bound amanuenses. Every story was specific, and the only bewildering thing about them was that no two accounts agreed in any important particular. In every case the absolute respectability of the witnesses was established beyond cavil. It was merely their affidavits that conflicted. Never had so many poor souls been so horribly bereaved as by the unexampled slaughter of this war. The vast army of mourners fell prey to a vast army of tricksters of a peculiar and vulturine loathsomeness feeding on the hearts of the living, and vending conversations with the dead to distracted parents and lovers, giving vague glimpses of the dead in cabinets, receiving letters from them by pen, pencil, and ouija, and

usually charging as much as the traffic would bear. Like vultures, they fought with one another over the unresisting quarry. Intellectually, the world had gone back *en masse* to the days of the witches and wizards.

The ouija-board came into amazing power and threatened to drive the piano and the ukulele out of use. A lady in St. Louis wrote a number of poems under the "unquestionable" control of a seventeenth-century lady, who spoke a dialect never known on earth at any period. These had such success that the versatile spook wrote novels of other periods, one of them a vivid eye-witness picture of the times of Christ.

Other ladies in the mid-West brought Mark Twain back from the dead and made him write humorous works. This was a good joke on the immortal Mark, since his ouijacious books competed with his posthumous books, in which he fiercely combated the religious traditions of his country. It must be an inconvenience even in Paradise to learn that you may be yanked out of blissful communion with the immortals at any moment by the command of any medium to whom any believer pays two dollars.

An improvement on the ouija-board, which is at best a rather cumbersome form of typewriter, was the invention of automatic writing. Imitators of Mrs. Piper and her school sat at a table and held pen or pencil while people from the other world wrote descriptions, philosophical dissertations, and moral treatises on conditions across the grave. They answered questions and in every instance gave absolute proof that fraud was inconceivable. Mr. Basil King published a volume of beautiful cable-matter written by a young girl who could not possibly have known what she was writing—he was sure of that. It is fine to find somebody who still thinks he knows all a young girl knows.

As you can tell solid silver by the hall-mark, *sterling*, so you can tell occultism by the phrase always stamped on it in the formulas to the effect that what is described is given on the testimony of absolutely honest persons with no motive for deception, and that every precaution has been taken against fraud.

Yet there is a little cinder in the eyes of all these visions; none of these miracles is ever allowed to influence everyday

existence or set up new standards. Evidence that establishes our whole eternal future is not permitted to sway us in the purchase of shoes or the trial of sneak-thieves. Real money and real life make a tremendous difference.

So the poor Summerlin household continued to search for Bob's ghostly money. The culprit Zeb did not have to mimic gloom. He knew where the money was, but he did not know what to do with it.

To return it now and confess the incredible audacity of its theft was to invite one or both of two disasters—an instant, a permanent exile from Bob's favor or the prompt delivery of the money to the unbearable Yarmys. He was so frantic with his dilemma that he was glad of an excuse to run about in a futile paper-chase.

Fatigue alone put an end to the rummage. Mrs. Summerlin sent Pansy to get luncheon ready and Zeb to finish his work up-stairs; then she dropped into a chair opposite the exhausted April. Their legs and arms had struck, but their eyes kept working and kept raising new hopes that lifted the weary bodies and lured them to some spot already pried into a dozen times.

When even their eyes had tired of patrolling the room their minds continued to scrutinize theories. Mrs. Summerlin recurred to the possibility of ghosts. They make a convenient explanation of strange sounds at night and of odd optical illusions, but few people really believe in them, since the one test of genuine belief is practice. A creed to which we pay only lip-service is only a sham.

Many learned volumes and tons of psychical research reports have been devoted to the noisy and mischievous species of imp called the *Poltergeist*, but his playground is the dark and lonely room where he can throw sticks about, break crockery, and otherwise amuse himself according to his peculiarly infantile, not to say imbecile, tastes. He is not the sort of flibbertigibbet that would flow through a keyhole and carry off five thousand-dollar bills, especially as the bills, not being spiritualized, would have undoubtedly attracted attention if the invisible fairy carried them visibly across the room.

There are numberless instances of wrecked railroad trains, dead men's clothes, clanking chains, armor, swords, pistols,

shoes, stockings, horses, dogs, wigs, and what not being materialized from the grave for the entertainment of those who can "see things." Every tribe of savages and every modern community, all the religions and all the gods, have had revenants, not merely of souls, but also of shoes, sandals, weapons, and decent clothing. As Conan Doyle points out, nice ghosts do not go naked. But there are few if any instances of ghosts dematerializing current objects of furniture, wardrobe, or finance. The fairies in Ireland often misplace objects, but they are not seriously charged with theft.

Mrs. Summerlin toyed with the ghostly explanation, but it did not begin to satisfy her and it began to irritate April into a state of nerves. Mrs. Summerlin dropped the theory finally when April snapped:

"Don't be an idiot, mother."

Mrs. Summerlin sat quiet for a time; then she gave a start. She remembered reading something about clairvoyants who could find lost objects and do all sorts of wonderful things. She had cut out an advertisement of such a miracle-monger. In some of the cities, though not in New York, these silly cheats were permitted to prey upon the foolish public, provided they took out a city license!

Mrs. Summerlin was rash enough to say, "Didn't I see something in the paper about a clairvoyant who could find lost objects and stolen things and give all sorts of wonderful information?"

"Yes, mother darling!" April groaned.

When April said "mother darling," Mrs. Summerlin always knew that she was in for a bit of filial castigation for her own good. She got it now.

"You read in the paper that one clairvoyant lost some money of her own and appealed to the police to get it back; and you read that another was arrested for telling fortunes; the poor fool didn't even know that the woman she was telling the fortune to was really a woman detective gathering evidence against her."

"Oh!" said the humbled mother, meekly, looking down at her fingers and feeling quite spanked.

April went on. "If you're thinking of voodoo and charms, let's call Pansy out of the kitchen and give her some tea-grounds or a pack of cards."

Mrs. Summerlin was vexed almost to insubordination, but Pansy appeared timely and announced luncheon.

Mrs. Summerlin called Zeb down to finish the studio while they were in the dining-room. And when the dismal meal was finished she sent him into the dining-room to vacuum-clean that. He also cleaned up some cold luncheon in the kitchen, at Pansy's more or less insulting invitation. Then he appeared before Mrs. Summerlin and bade her a very good day. She was thinking of Bob's lost money too intently to remember Zeb's money, and so she bade him good day absently. He bade her good day once more with an unmistakable inflection that called for wages. She paid him well and wished him well and urged him to take great care of his young master, who was very young.

Zeb reassured her. "Have no fears, Miz Sum'lin, I been young mase'f, and I been old. That's mo' than what folks kin say who has only been young."

As he lugged his machine through the kitchen to the freight elevator, he promised Pansy that he would come and see her.

"Wait till somebody 'vites you," she snapped.

Zeb just laughed and chortled, "Lawdy! but it does ma old soul good to find you jes' the same little spit-cat I lef' behime when you and me was little."

But as the elevator took Zeb down it took his contentment down with it. The grin that had spread like molasses over his face fermented to old sorghum. All triumphs turn out to be burdens finally, as the great world was beginning to discover. Its rulers, the League-makers in Paris, were still wrangling among themselves, and when they returned to their several countries they would find new wrangles at home and a multitudinous dissatisfaction that threatened to convert the victory into ruin.

Old Zeb left the Summerlin apartment with more loot than he had ever expected to look at at one time. He had five thousand dollars in the container of his vacuum-cleaner, but it began to grow so heavy that he felt sure the five little slips of paper were transmuted into bushels of silver dollars. He was afraid that burglars would break in and steal. He had always felt before that his rags were armor against footpads — *cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator.*

But now innocent passengers who glanced at his baggage seemed to him to look at it with suspicion and covetousness. Finally Zeb grew conspicuous, for there is no more certain way to attract attention than to be desperately eager to avoid it.

## CHAPTER III

ZEB hastened so like a thief, he rewarded the most indifferent look with such a glare, that people began to turn and wonder. If there had been a policeman handy, they would probably have sent him on an errand after Zeb. But they were too busy to take up the pursuit. When Zeb at last reached the small room in West Fifty-third Street which served as his office and his residence, he locked himself in, pulled down the shade, turned on a light, took off the lid of the container, and dumped out the contents. There among the rubbish he was almost surprised to find the five magic plasters, twisted by the suction and the swift passage through the hose into little wads and lamplighters.

Zeb caressed them and talked to them and called them "honeys" and "chillun." But he was afraid of them. It would be so easy for them to be blown away or set on fire. It would be so hard to protect them from the unimaginable horror of loss. Where could he put them? He would as soon have carried five copperhead snakes on his person as kept them about him. To leave them in his office was his only other recourse; yet he debated it until he was almost out of his wits.

He told himself that a burglar would never waste time or skill on such a den as his, and yet he felt that thieves must have a scent for money as bloodhounds for runaways. He studied where he might best hide the bills, and tested a dozen crannies. He thought of the very scheme Poe used in *The Purloined Letter*, though he had never heard of Poe or his story. He arrived at the wise decision that the trick of hiding them by leaving them in plain view was too risky. Poe was able to make his story come out the way he wanted it to, but Zeb could not control his visitors.

There was another danger—the most terrible thief of all—fire. Fire would stick its slim, red fingers into any crevice

and spend the money instanter. He reckoned that there would be a partial safety in the metal container, and put the bills and the rubbish back where they had been. He draped an old coat over the thing with a painful effort to secure a look of carelessness.

But he dared not leave the treasure there. It would be best on all counts to have it in his master's home. Then, whatever happened, he could protest his innocence of theft.

So he set out for the Deucalion. He felt rich and important enough now to take a taxicab. When he reached the hotel he learned that Bob had gone out, but had left word that Zeb was to be admitted to his rooms. The sight of Bob's possessions gave him a sense of wonderful repose. He felt himself to be one of the Taxter possessions, long astray, but retrieved at last.

The black prodigal had finished with the husks of independence. The hunter was home from the hill, and the slave was home from freedom.

Zeb had been a slave, the son and grandson of slaves. The meek genealogy of his family traced back to some ancestor who came over in no *Mayflower*, but in the steerage of those dreadful hulks that dragged from Africa and sold to America a problem that it will never solve. It was not Zeb's fault that his forebears had been stolen from the continent that had sunburnt them, and had been transported to a continent where their tint would be their guilt.

Nor was it the fault of the white people of this generation that such hideous merchandise had been dealt in by ancestors to whom slavery had a patriarchal and a scriptural authority. The earlier generations had debated the riddle for more than half a century in Congress, and then for four years on bloody battle-fields. The slaves had been proclaimed free and their new status written among the statutes, but it is easy to amend legal laws and hard to achieve amendments of the human constitution. Negroes were still born black in spite of Lincoln and Grant.

Thousands of them had recently been put into the uniform and sent under the flag to France. There some of them had met glory and a glorious death. Into all of them had been instilled the doctrine that they were citizens and defenders of liberty. The sympathizers with Germany had counted

upon black revolutions, but the negroes had run no amucks in 1918, as they had run none in 1862. And yet the old docility was no longer universal among them. The pride that upheld them overseas persisted when they came home, and the race problem was added to the labor crisis, and both to the chaos of crises that kept the world tremulous.

In Washington and then in Chicago and other cities North and South race riots flamed up for a few days, and white snipers shot down negroes, and motor-cars filled with armed negroes made forays along crowded streets. In Omaha a mob would burn down the City Hall and string up the mayor to get to a vile negro; the mayor would be saved just before he died, and through the midnight streets of the Nebraska city fiends would race, dragging the hanged and burned and bullet-ridden cadaver of the negro till it was almost worn away. In old London for centuries distinguished citizens had been hanged, drawn over the cobbles, cut apart and stuck up piecemeal for an ornament and a warning; but what is legal for one period is hideous for another, and the African immigrants-in-spite-of-themselves were revenging themselves centuries after by covering the United States with its foulest shames.

The terrors were brief, but they were ominous. They proved that the whites would rather kill and torture negroes than grant them equality, and that some of the negroes would rather accept death than accept inequality. Exactly the same things had happened in greater degree during the centuries of debate among various sects of the Christian and other religions, but religious deeds as well as legal deeds go in and out of fashion.

Their choice was so well understood by the vast bulk of the dark populace that they ordered their lives and their ambitions and pleasures on a subordinate plane. Zeb was one of these. He had no more desire to be one of the whites than a tiger-lily has to be a rose. He wanted to be a good man, a good black man, and take the goods the good Lord provided for good negroes. His heart was full of noble intentions, of wise saws, and of virtuous precepts. He toiled hard and was as honest as his lights allowed. He was as good a man as he could be, and he trusted that his reward would be delivered to him in another world. He did not even

wonder whether there would be a separate negro heaven or not, or whether or not he should find himself white on the other side of Jordan.

He had stolen five thousand dollars, of course, but it was for the sake of the family to which he was as abjectly devoted as an English peer to a reigning dynasty or an American to his political party. Zeb was an hereditary retainer of the house of Taxter and as proud of his servility as if the name were York or Plantagenet. He wanted to give the money back and take what punishment his devotion might win. But he wanted to make sure that it should not fall into the hands of the unholy house of Yarmy.

## CHAPTER IV

BOB'S thoughts of the Yarmys were a swirl of contradictory impressions. Joe had disappointed and angered him by his uncouth uproar over the loss of the money. Bob had never thought of Joe as a gentleman by instinct or training. Now he saw that he was a noisy and an ugly rotter.

But he could find nothing to complain of in Kate's behavior. He had thought of her as a lady by instinct, though not by breeding. She had been far more courteous to April than April to her. She had replied to April's insulting insinuations with the soft answers that, passing from one woman to another, turn wrath into fury.

Bob was haunted by the sad look in Kate's eyes as she bade him a long farewell after his statement that the deal was off. He felt now that he had been needlessly curt. He had said nothing personal to Kate, but had let her go out of his life as bluntly as if she had been the merest acquaintance. Yet he had held her in his arms; he had danced with her ardently and audaciously; he had tried to kiss her and had been compelled to forgo her lips and treat her with respect. He had thrilled with secret thoughts of long communions with her, of a partnership in the oil-fields. He felt about his hand now the warm pressure of her fingers. They had let go as a woman's might when she drowned. Kate was sinking and drowning now in the ocean of oblivion, the ocean made up of the throngs we might have known better, might have known wildly well, or fatally.

Bob was harrowed, too, by the puncture of the huge bubble of his dreams. A few hours ago and he was a man with a future, a man of potential wealth, with a definite plan of campaign. Now he was a young fellow with half his fortune and all of his hopes gone; he was a crass youth meeting his mother at a train.

Bob loved his mother and he was proud of her. She was

very beautiful and full of haughty grace that grew meek and devoted at the sight of him. It was good to have her in his arms, cooing her delight at having him to lean on again, praising him with idolatrous extravagances whose excess delighted him while convincing him of his own unworthiness of them.

She had not taken her luncheon in the dining-car, and he went with her through long crypts to the vasty majesty of the Pennsylvania Hotel, where they ate and chattered. She wanted to hear all about his exploits in France. Everybody else he had met was so fed up on military reminiscences that he never dared describe an adventure at length, and hardly to allude to the fact that he had been a soldier at all. He reveled in his mother's appetite for anecdote. She seemed to be convinced that he had won the war single-handed. She gasped with terror at what he had dared.

He had been a good soldier and he could afford to brag to his mother with a childlike ingenuousness, because the more he aggrandized himself the more tribute he paid her for mothering him into the world. But even while he recounted his tremendous charges up the sky and his inconceivably wild descents from the empyrean, the back of his head was full of the bitter truth that he was a civilian again and that both his occupation and his ambition were gone.

She spoke of his legacy and he had to confess to the appalling truth that half of it had melted into thin air without even making a puff of smoke.

"But I'm going to make twice as much with the half that is left," he said, "and I've got to go to it right away."

"Oh no!" his mother moaned. "You're going to take a good long rest and have a long, long visit with me."

There has never been a keener spur to youthful ambition, probably, than the appeals of a mother who knows enough or happens, unwittingly, to beg her son not to work too hard. All advice sets up a sense of opposition, and parents who forever hold the lash over their children create more balkiness than energy. Mrs. Taxter was altogether sincere in imploring her son to leisure, but the result was to inflame his impatience to succeed. So now the impetuous will, the burning frenzy for action that had made him a superb warrior who forgot his mother and bantered death, made him

ruthless toward her and set him frantic to be about his raid upon fortune.

When they had finished luncheon he called a taxicab and gave the driver the address of his aunt Sally, at whose house his mother was to stop. Bob had not yet found time even to call there. As the cab ground its halting way up Fifth Avenue, almost solid with motor-cars, the brief dashes and the long stops threw Bob into one of those nerve-storms of his when his soul was like a sultry sky aching with suppressed lightning. In a flash of impulse he tapped on the glass and told the driver to stop at his bank.

He explained to his mother that he was short of funds and wanted to draw out a little cash. He was a bit swaggery about it, and he returned the salute of the tall carriage-man with a snap. He started to write a check for fifty dollars, but his muscles expressed his obsession, and when his pen wrote "*Fi*," before he knew, it had run into "*Five thousand*" instead of "*Fifty*."

He was about to tear up the check, but he paused to consider and was lost. Bob was one of those who do wise things on instinct and unwise on reason. He did not tear up the check. He took it to the paying-teller, who gave his unfamiliar face a searching glance and went to verify the signature and the amount on deposit.

While Bob waited for the telautograph to report on his account, he wondered if he would not leave for Texas that very night—not if he could or should, but if he would. Bob was always wondering what he would do. He never knew in advance. He was afraid of himself, and not without excuse. His calmer self, like a substantial parent, had often to pay the bills of the unruly son who was his other self.

It occurred to Bob that while he would certainly not be going to Texas to meet Kate Yarmy, of course he might run into her there. It would indeed be his duty to look over the property of the Yarmys, and he might still go in with them.

Hot flashes ran through his scalp as if his brain were ignited with its own reckless adventurings. He saw Kate Yarmy in a highly enhanced vision. He wanted to be true to April in his least thought, but he could not keep his fancies always on the leash. It is a great victory for a soul to be loyal in its conduct, but who ever tamed the imagina-

tion? It is as lawless and uncontrollable as a populace of bees. To have the workers come home to the hive of nights is as much as can be expected. And they often sting as they toil, or stagger back drunken with alien nectar found beyond the fenced clover-patch of domestic ownership.

At length the teller returned and asked Bob how he would have his money. Bob answered, with majestic indifference, as if he were merely scratching his account instead of canceling it:

"Five ones, please."

As soon as he had spoken he felt an alarm. He had drawn out five other "ones," and they had disappeared. He remembered how Tom Sawyer had tried to find a lost marble by tossing away another marble and saying, "Brother, go find your brother." Bob wondered if he were going to send these bills after their brothers to bring them back or be lost with them. He dared not change his order, however, and with a strangled "Thank you" he slid the balance of his wealth across the glass plate and tucked it in the inside pocket of his waistcoat.

He was so alarmed at this larceny from himself that he dared not confess to his mother the conspiracy he was meditating against her dreams of a long visit with him. He spoke of being awfully busy with his investment investigations; he said that he was "looking into oil," and he implied that he might have to run out of town for a while to make a personal study of the field.

His mother implored him not to trouble his poor brain till it was rested after his frightful experiences abroad; she pleaded with him not to try to get rich, and described the dismal life his uncle Randolph Chatterson had led piling up the fortune that he had never enjoyed. With what we like to call a "Southern" devotion to life as a comfort and not as a career, she said:

"It's your business as an heir to spend your inhe'itance, not to be a miser like your uncle was."

And this easy counsel, as usual, stimulated Bob to new determination. The duty of obedience to one's mother is, of all duties, the one most honored in the breach instead of the observance.

Bob accepted his aunt Sally's reproaches for his neglect

of her with further allusions to his tremendous plans, and, unable to endure the petty chatter of the two women, made a contemptible excuse for escape:

"I'll leave you two to unload your gossip, and I'll run down-town and attend to a little business."

His mother gave a cry of protest, but she could not hold him. Seeking any excuse to be with him and to see where and how he lived, she said she would call up the Summerlins and ask them to meet her at his hotel as a half-way house. He acceded to this and hurried to the Deucalion to think.

The sky was black overhead with livid blotches. Gusts of wind scurried along the streets like heralds warning all good people to take shelter, for a great rain was coming. Along the pavements old newspapers were skating, and the carefully garnered heaps of waste collected by the street-cleaners were being scattered by the mischief in the air.

Bob looked up at the sky where he had outflown the birds of storm and felt meek and shamed as he hurried along the ground, craven before a threat of mere raindrops. He could not find a taxicab, and by and by from the cloud-emplacements the machine-guns of heaven began a barrage of water-bullets. Bob turned up his collar and ran.

## CHAPTER V

BY this time the ex-professor of vacuum-cleaning had installed himself in Bob's two rooms as a valet, butler, maid, counselor, dictator, and slave. There was enough for him to do as a body-servant, for Bob's effects were in utter disarray, and Zeb took the same delight in straightening them that a mother does in an infant's wardrobe. Black hands love white clothes, and Zeb was almost matronly in his affectionate disposition of Bob's personal linen.

He was interrupted by the telephone, and wandered about, looking for it. When he found it he was shocked to hear a woman's voice that was not Miss April's. Zeb had various kinds of respectfulness to offer, and he used one of the lowest grades in answering this perilous invisible intruder who answered Zeb's vague "Hello!" with so sweet a query:

"Is this Mista Taxta?"

"No'm. I'm his boy."

"His boy! I didn't know he had one."

"I ain't his son-boy—jes' his plain boy-boy."

"Oh, I see. Well, is he in?"

"No'm—no'm— I don't know jes' how soon he's bein' back. Shall I give him yo' name? No'm? . . . No'm. . . . Yas'm!"

He hung up the receiver and glared into the transmitter as if he were trying to see along the wire. The voice had a certain familiarity. He shouted at the telephone:

"If you'm Miss Yahmy, you go 'long abote yo' business and keep offa ouah wiah."

He turned away in a fury. He caught sight of himself in a cheval-glass, and his anger was changed to frank rapture. He imagined himself in the livery he had seen on the butlers of his plantation days. He decided to go out at once and buy his "trousseau." He dallied awhile and posed and bowed and practised attitudes upon his understudy in the mirror, talking to it moodily according as it behaved.

"That you, Zeb? Lawdy, but you'm lookin' grand." He went to an imaginary door, took an imaginary card on an imaginary tray, and bowed an imaginary visitor to a seat. "Howdy, Miss April. You'm lookin' mighty fine these days. When's that old weddin'-day comin' 'roun'?"

Then he fussed about among the wedding guests with all the tyranny and pride of old negro servants at a Southern ceremony. Pansy, of course, was all dressed up and standing well to the fore, and weeping hopelessly, as was proper to the mammy of the bride. But of course Zeb was outraged at her fears for Miss April as the wife of Masta Bob and the special ward of Uncle Zeb. His vision of the howling Pansy as mammy-of-honor was so vivid that when the telephone summoned him from his prophetic fancies he was terrified to hear Pansy's own voice crackling therein:

"Hello! Is Mista Taxta thah?"

"No," Zeb yelled. "Who's you?"

"This Pansy."

"Pansy? Pansy who?"

"Go 'long, you old fool."

"Oh, now I knows that gentle voice!"

"Shut up whilst I tell you ma messidge. Miz Taxta invited ma Miss Ma'y and Miss April to meet her there, and Miss Ma'y say to say we-all will be about half a houah late."

"I reckon us Taxtas would expec' that of you Summalins." His voice turned to the thickest and stickiest of cane-syrup as he murmured, "Say, Pansy Blossom, does you love me?"

"Don't pesta me, nigga, don't pesta me!"

"That's the talk! I knowed you did." He was still chuckling as he asked, "Has you-all located them thousand-dolla' bills yet?"

"No. I even sifted the ashes in the grate, and they ain't nowhahs."

"I reckon a angel must 'a' called 'em home. Well, good-by, Pansy Blossom. I'm so busy I cain't linga no longa."

"You busy!" Pansy cackled, and cut the parley short.

As Zeb hung up the receiver he heard a key turning in the lock; the door opened and his master entered in such a flurry that when the door-knob caught in his pocket he ripped the cloth before he could check himself.

He swore beautifully. Zeb was amazed and impressed by

his vocabulary. He was very sympathetic as he helped remove the torn and rain-drenched coat.

"Ain't dat scan'lous? Whaffor they want to put knobs on a do' for? I'll mend it up all nice."

Bob scowled. "The patch would show."

"Not on me," Zeb grinned. Bob stared at him, recognizing the familiar passion of Zeb's kind for old suits. "Good Lord! are you taking my clothes already?"

Zeb smiled. "That vest won't be much good to you, seein' the coat's done rip."

Bob tossed his hands in despair before such greed, whipped off his waistcoat and handed it over. "Anything else you want?"

Bob darted into his bedroom and began to empty his trousers pockets there.

Zeb followed to inquire, "What suit you allowin' to put on in place of them pants of mine you're wearin'?"

"The blue serge."

"I'll git it out." As he crossed to the clothes-closet, Bob gave a start and a cry, ran to him, and felt in the inside pocket of the waistcoat on Zeb's arm. He took thence five thousand dollars and verified them before Zeb's popping eyes. Zeb stared at the vacuum-cleaner in the corner and wondered if it were bewitched. He stammered:

"You's found the los' money?"

"No, this is another five thousand I just drew out of the bank."

Zeb fairly groaned with relief. Bob asked, "Has anybody telephoned about the other five?"

Zeb gave him Pansy's message and her information that the money was not yet found. He forgot to mention the visit of the Summerlins or the anonymous caller on the telephone.

Bob mused aloud: "Where in God's name could that money have gone? Five thousand dollars! And they just went—whiff! Nobody was near them; yet away they flew. It's uncanny. I haven't an idea who took it, have you?"

Zeb folded the torn coat with shivering hands as he confessed, "Well, I—I has an idy."

"You have an idea? You don't suspect the Yarmys, do you?"

"No, that's about the onliest thing on earth I wouldn't accuse 'em of."

"Who then?"

Zeb wished that he could change the subject. He said, "Well, I—I got an idy it was snagged by somebody what loves you."

"You don't mean Miss April?" Bob cried.

"I ain't namin' no names," Zeb protested, aghast at the complexity of his position.

Bob laughed at him. "Of course she was determined to prevent my going to Texas, but—oh, I couldn't suspect her!"

"Ef I was you, Masta Bob, I wouldn't suspect nobody. I'd jest wait. It 'll pop up some day you least suspect it."

"But I need it now, damn it. It puts a crimp in all my plans. Now I have to go to Texas with only half the chance I had."

"You has to go to Texas?" Zeb howled, in a frenzy of alarm.

"Yes, and I may go any minute."

Zeb was desperate enough to offer a prayer. "If you ask my advice, you'll marry Miss April and take us all back home."

"Marry Miss April!" Bob laughed softly and bitterly as he gazed at the engagement-ring April had returned to him. He had taken it from his pocket and tossed it on the bureau with the wad of bills.

"Ain't you goin' to marry Miss April?" Zeb whispered, in horror.

"No, but I'm goin' to fire you if you're not careful. Did I hire you as a lawyer or a valet?"

"Valet—valet!" Zeb gasped. "You betta stand out of them damp pants befo' you ketches cold in the laigs."

He found the blue-serge trousers, and Bob changed to them while Zeb stood regarding the five thousand dollars on the bureau. He was tempted to seize this wealth also and cache it till Bob changed his mind about Texas. When the telephone rang, and Bob pocketed the money and went into his drawing-room to answer it, Zeb was almost distraught with temptation to follow and take it from him. The only thing that checked his rashness was the memory of the torture the first five thousand had given, and still gave, him.

From the telephone Bob received a message that amazed him. The hotel central sang out:

"Say, lieutenant, your sister is on the way up."

"My what?"

"She said she was your sister," the central answered, with a tone of sophisticated skepticism in her voice.

"You must mean my mother," Bob said.

"She didn't look like anybody's mother," the central taunted, and went about her other chores.

## CHAPTER VI

BOB stood wondering. His first thought was of April. But she would never come up alone to a man's room in a hotel. She would never think of pretending to be a sister in order to get past the guardians of that hostelry's easy morals.

A rush of wind from the increasing storm outside banged the door between his bedroom and his living-room. It was followed by a soft knock on the door. He called out, "Come!" from where he stood.

The door opened slowly and, as it were, slyly, and Kate Yarmy slipped into the room, closed the door behind her, and stood smiling at him questioningly and with a look of light challenge.

She was as beautiful against the dull brown of the door as if a sudden angel stood there in golden apparition. Her face had the wind-blown, rain-blessed glow of a ripe peach, and her eyes had the daring gaiety of a young vixen whose motives are ambiguous between innocence and intrigue.

Bob stared at her in speechless admiration, fear, and curiosity. He could not speak till she unlocked her lips with the word we use so incessantly and with such variety of content, "Well?"

Then all he could think of was a stupid, "Why, it's Miss Yarmy!"

She made a feint at turning away. "Of co'se, if you were expectin' somebody else—"

"No, no. I'm not expecting anybody—except my mother and some other people—later."

"Your motha? Oh, then ladies do visit you here?"

"Not alone—that is—not ladies like you—young and beauti—"

"Go on," she teased.

"Beautiful!" he finished, uncomfortably.

"I was afraid you were goin' to rob me of that," she

laughed, still nailed to the door whence he did not dare invite her to advance, especially as he suddenly realized that he was standing before her without coat or waistcoat.

To a man of his habit, an inappropriate costume was equivalent to a nakedness, and he felt exactly the same emotions and fugacity. His distress was apparent, but Kate misjudged its origin.

She pouted most fetchingly:

"I reckon I did ve'y wrong to come."

"Not wrong," Bob protested, "but—well—"

"I thought the elevata-boy looked at me in a funny way. But we Texas girls are used to goin' anywheah, you know. I'm nevva quite suah of maself up Nawth, and I'm always gettin' into trouble. My brotha shot a man once for mis-intuppretin'."

"Shot a man!" Bob gasped.

"He was a horrid old beast, anyway. Besides, my brotha hasn't the faintest idea I am heah. He'd kill me if he had, I reckon—and take a shot at you, maybe. But I—well, I just couldn't he'p comin'. I'm leavin' taown to-night."

This whole budget of information was staggering in several ways to Bob. But he could not reveal his uneasiness. It was like him, when he should have said, "Go away at once!" to say, "Won't you sit down?"

Kate moved forward to a chair with a leopard-like lissomeness of peculiar grace and omen. The way she disposed her limbs in the chair was oddly interesting. She was very round, and it was pleasantly manifest that she had the use of all her joints.

Bob said, "If you'll pardon me one minute, I'll put on my coat."

But he had to wait to hear her when she ignored this remark and said, "I was wonderin' if you-all had found the lost money yet."

"Not a trace of it."

"That's just tew bad. And it was all you had, you poor boy?"

Bob defended himself from the "poor" by remarking, "Well, I have five thousand left."

"Oh, I am glad!" said Kate. "It would break my heart to have you lose everything on our account."

"It wasn't your fault at all, but—if you'll let me get my coat."

"Please don't botha! I'm used to men in shirt-sleeves. Joe nevva wears a coat in Texas. I'm goin' to take off my hat, if you don't mind. It got almost torn off ma head in that awful rain-stawm. Most of my hair-pins went with it."

Bob stood watching the swift, deft motions of her graceful arms, realizing cloudily what an art women make of putting on or taking off a hat. It is as if their arms performed a solemn dance about their heads.

Kate lifted away the heap of colored straws and feathers and ribbons and skewered it to the back of the chair with a long hat-pin.

Then she began tossing her radiant hair about with her fingers, complaining, "My hair is a sight!"

"A beautiful sight!" Bob sighed.

"Oh, you Virginians!" she gurgled, twisting in the chair to peer at him around the edge of it and, as it were, pouring her gracious upper body across the ledge of the arm of it. "You Virginians aren't afraid to tell a woman the pretty things she's achin' to hear, are you?"

"Aren't we?" said Bob. "I can tell you a lot more if you'll let me get into a coat."

Kate laughed and nodded her consent. He went to the door and called to Zeb to bring his coat.

Kate leaped to her feet and fluttered. "Oh, is some one else here?"

"Only my black man."

"I knew I shouldn't have come!"

Zeb appeared at the door with the blue-serge coat and waistcoat ready for Bob's arms. He peered round Bob's shoulder as they struggled into place. The look he gave Kate was frankly hostile. She answered it in kind.

Bob turned his back on Kate while he buttoned his waistcoat. This was another of the subtleties of modesty. When he turned round he made sure that the inner door was open—as a protection to Kate.

She lowered her voice as Bob took a chair in front of her. Also she sat more erect and drew down her skirts—with that quaint way many women have of lifting them a little higher before they shake them down—the same mystic habit that

leads them to wear gowns cut very low and then to keep their hands fluttering about for concealment.

"You must think I'm puffectly crazy," she said.

"You're perfectly charming," said Bob.

"You're mighty nice to say so, anyway," she beamed. "But you see, when we left the home of Miss Summalin—isn't she a dolling girl, a puffect dolling—Joe found at ouah hotel a telegram saying we must go back to Texas at once—to-night. Somebody's disputin' ouah title to ouah own home. We've got to go back and fight for it."

Bob was so instant and sincere with his regrets that she was encouraged to go on:

"I just couldn't leave without tellin' you good-by. I wish you could have gone into pawtnaship, because—because—oh, I like you mighty much. I oughtn't to say it, but I can't he'p tellin' you."

She put out her hand in appeal. He took it and pressed it. It hurt him like the drawing of an arrow out of a wound when she took it from his clasp, and his blood seemed to go out after it.

"I just dashed ova here and I got blown to pieces. My hair—don't look at me."

"I can't keep my eyes off you," said Bob, rushing into the opportunity for praise that she opened, as the air pursues and closes about a fleeing object. Courtesy also abhors vacuums, and canny women are always establishing them for polite men to fill with compliments. In Bob's part of the country, not to praise a woman when the occasion offers is to insult her. His heart was suddenly blooming with bouquets of flattery to offer this strange creature who welcomed them so well.

With an abrupt impatience and a very pretty show of temper she tore down the structure of her hair and let it stream about her shoulders. In Spain women are forbidden to go to church with their hair uncovered. In Turkey the revelation of a woman's tresses is a terrible thing, or was until the war tore the yashmak from the face of the Turkish woman and sent her into the munition-factories and thence into modern times.

Bob's heart was losing itself in that poetic madness of Kate's locks. But her words were prosaic enough.

"Do you happen to have a few hair-pins?"

He laughed with shivering jaws. "I don't use them."

"What shall I do? I've got to get out of here and go back to Joe and—maybe your man would go and get me some hair-pins."

Bob was either too innocent to realize that Zeb's departure would leave them entirely unchaperoned, or desperate enough to wish him gone. In any case, he called Zeb to him.

"Yassa!" Zeb answered at the door with a startling promptitude that proved he had not gone far away.

Bob said, "About a block down the street is a little notion-store—"

"Does you want some little notions?" he queried, impudently.

Bob was cold. "Go there and get a package of hair-pins."

"I reckon one of them chambamaids has 'em. I'll ring."

Kate answered smartly, "I don't care to borrow hair-pins from a chambermaid, if you don't mind."

"Certainly not!" said Bob—and to Zeb: "Do as you're told. Here's the money."

Bob's hand dived into his pocket and pulled up, with a heap of change, the bills. Kate's eyes widened, but she said nothing. But Zeb did. He took his life in his hands and ventured a fearful impertinence.

"Betta hadn't you leave that money in the safe downstairs?"

Bob scowled and muttered, "Get along!"

Zeb went into the hall by the bedroom door. He was defeated and afraid.

## CHAPTER VII

AS soon as Zeb had gone Kate grew more comfortable, and rose to ask:

"While we're waiting for the hair-pins, could you lend me a comb and a brush?"

"Certainly!" said Bob, hastening into his bedroom. As he turned from the bureau he saw her standing at the door with a childlike curiosity.

"May I have a peek? So this is where you live? Would you mind if I used your mirror there?"

Bob was in a state of foolish terror. He could not possibly remind her that there was a mirror over the mantel in the living-room. He stepped aside as she marched to the bureau and began to comb and brush and braid and coil her plentiful tresses into the mystery of a coiffure.

Two natures struggled bitterly in Bob's heart. One of them pleaded with him: "Get you gone to a distance from this temptation. Turn your eyes from her beauty and your feet from her neighborhood. Save her from her own guilelessness or from her own guile. Beware of entangling alliances!" The other spirit raged at him: "Don't be a white-blooded ninny. Take her in your arms. That's what she's here for. She'll despise you if you don't, and you'll despise yourself if you let her go. What are you—a man or a clam?"

He was actually quivering with the wrestling-match, but neither warrior for his soul could quite prevail.

Kate parted the curtains of her hair to peer out at him with twinkling eyes and to murmur, with a frightful childishness:

"Aren't we getting well acquainted?"

"Aren't we?"

She gathered her hair about her head and made a rope of its length and laid it across one shoulder, while she noted

that she had a few flowers at her bosom. She broke one rose from the cluster and said:

"I wish you would come to Texas some time. We have roses like this in the dead of winter, and magnolias like bowls of alabasta. Will you wear this for me—as a little remembrance—of a foolish girl?"

She drew close to him, while he stood like a statue—a statue of new bronze only whose surface was established and within all one core of fire. She put her hands to the lapel of his coat and tucked the stem of a rose in the buttonhole. It seemed to thrust down into his heart. The savor of her hair was drugging the gentler warrior that pleaded with him very faintly now to have mercy on himself and on this woman equally in peril, whether through ignorance or wile.

She looked up at him with a smile like the swift blooming of a human rose. Still he could not put out his hand to touch her or set his lips against hers.

After an eternity of a moment she moaned, "I think I am going to faint."

She clutched at the throat of her gown and tore it open a little, and toppled against him. Now he had to take her in his arms and help her to a chair. And then he could no more take his arms from her than he could put them around her before. Yet her helplessness protected her from him—and him from her beauty.

While he hovered irresolute he heard a knocking at the door in the other room.

Kate heard it, too. She opened her eyes and whispered, "Oh, my God, if it should be my brotha!"

Bob thought of a more horrible confrontation and whispered, "Or my mother!"

Kate clutched at his hands and shuddered. "Oh, why did I ever come? If it's Joe, he'll kill us both!" She began to sob.

Her terror furnished Bob a little courage. "Better be as quiet as you can—till I get rid of—whoever it is."

Bob went staggering into the living-room, closing the door back of him very softly. He was laboring over a smile for his mother, and feeling dog-sick at the necessity for hypocrisy before her.

All the mad sweetness of the adventure with the pretty girl turned to a loathsome dust and ashes. Now he saw in

BOB WAS IN A STATE OF FOOLISH TERROR

the cruel light of decency the old but indomitable truism that Kate was what every girl is likely to be—somebody's sister now and somebody's mother in some future day. He hated himself for the necessary hypocrisy that forced him to assume a careless tone as he called, "Come in!"

The door swung back and Joe Yarmy lurched in. There was an ugly set to his jaws, a light in his eyes like the glint from a revolver barrel.

Bob's uneasy glance caught a glimpse of Kate's hat pinned to the chair.

Joe Yarmy said, "I'm lookin' for ma sista."

## CHAPTER VIII

"TELL the truth and shame the devil" is noble advice; "Tell the truth and shame a woman" is not so handsome.

Virtues are always at war with one another, and there is no league of nations where their disputes can be settled; and if there were there would be no time to wait, for we must constantly act first and think afterward. The swift and beautiful instincts of loyalty and chivalry have no worse enemy than the beautiful but deliberate habit of truth.

Let moralists storm as they will, they will never make it pretty for a person to be willing to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about his family, his country, his religion, womankind, his guest, the strangers within his gates, or a number of other people and things for which he must be willing to lay down not only his life and his treasure, but also his veracity.

The truth about the truth is rarely considered. Of course, the truth about scientific, historical, or religious facts ought to be sacred and forever besought; but it isn't.

Prof. Goldwin Smith published a disturbing essay in which he quoted some very searching inquiries into the singular prestige that truth has among men as a moral power. It is rarely spoken, but always well spoken of. Some of the loudest worshipers of it are the most hostile foes it has and the rarest users of it. Even scientific and historical truth is offensive or boresome to the huge majority, of course. Vast numbers of people do not want to know the truth even for private information.

The manipulation of social truth is the test of discretion, breeding, and political acumen. Kant says that "a lie is an abandonment, or, as it were, annihilation of the dignity of man." And yet there are many occasions when the telling of the truth is the least dignified of actions. From childhood

on we despise the tattle-tale, and the tattle-tale is most despised when he tells an unpleasant truth.

To tell the truth, Bob Taxter never for a moment hesitated about telling a lie in the situation that was thrown about him like a net from an invisible hand. And he was a man that hated a lie like poison.

What else could he decently or sensibly do?

A young man suddenly finds his hotel rooms invaded by a personable young woman whom he likes and believes to be a good woman. She overwhelms him by frankly declaring that she cares for him too deeply to leave him without telling him how deeply she cares for him. She ingenuously takes off her rain-drenched hat and pins it to a chair. Then she goes into the adjoining room and proceeds to readjust her wind-blown locks.

It was inconceivable that Bob should turn her out of his rooms. Even poor Joseph won little glory for fleeing even from the outrageous wife of his benefactor.

What could poor Bob do, who was no Joseph?

He could only suffer in silence the exquisite anguishes any polite man endures in the presence of a demonstrative woman heedless of appearances or conventions.

He believed her innocent. He could only stand by and hope that nobody would burst in and suspect.

And then he heard a knock on the door. He stepped into the next room to protect the girl's good name.

He felt very miserable when he saw that the intruder was her brother and that he was in a surly humor. Bob went utterly forlorn when he noted that Kate's hat was pinned to a chair in plain view of a side glance.

But he never doubted for an instant that it was his whole duty as a man and a gentleman to surround the truth of the girl's indiscretion with a stockade of lies.

The fact that the odds seemed against him only made it feel more cowardly to surrender the girl's reputation without a struggle.

If he got killed—well, he had been an aviator in France for a year. The fear of death had been the first thing he had left at home with his civilian clothes. Cowardice was the supreme sin for a soldier.

The moral code of the modern soldier was a matter of

earnest study to everybody concerned in the war. One of the chaplains, Percy T. Edrop, wrote of an investigation made by the evangelists, Fred B. Smith and Dr. Elmer T. Clark, who sent out cards asking what the soldiers considered "the most repulsive sins."

Mr. Smith's answers established them as: 1—Cowardice; 2—Selfishness; 3—Stinginess; 4—Boastfulness. Doctor Clark's answers indicated five: 1—Cowardice; 2—Selfishness; 3—Hypocrisy; 4—Disloyalty; 5—Meanness.

That makes Seven Ugly Sins, all told.

Not one of the Seven Deadly Sins got into either list. Not one of the mortal or venial sins of the Catholic doctrine. Not one of the Ten Commandments of Israel.

Doctor Clark moralized upon the code of the soldiers as follows:

"They displayed a greater profundity, a better grasp of the fundamentals of the moral life, than any of the professional moralists who had presumed to lecture them."

And Mr. Smith said:

"I have come to believe that it is a fundamentally sound code. I for one am perfectly willing to get out and preach it. And I believe that our churches will have to take it into consideration in the future. We have laid too much stress on the old surface things, the old 'taboo' acts—dancing, card-playing, swearing, and so on. We have got to follow those boys down to the deeper things which are fundamental—courage, unselfishness, generosity, and humanity. When you come right down to it, those are the very lessons which the Great Teacher Himself tried to set before the world."

Bob Taxter acted on instinct, and instinct is an equation of infinite, complex factors. To have told the truth would have seemed to him to have violated all of the Seven Commandments of 1919. It would have been an act of cowardice, selfishness, stinginess, boastfulness, hypocrisy, disloyalty, and meanness.

So Bob lied like a soldier and a knight.

But truth, however hideous at times, is sometimes mighty,

and occasionally prevails. Now and then it takes the most cruel revenges on those who tamper with it. And this was one of the times.

Bob lied in vain.

When Joe Yarmy said to him, "I'm lookin' for ma sista," Bob, sparring for breath, stupidly mumbled:

"Your sister?"

"Yes, ma sista!" stormed Joe. "Is she here?"

"Here? Why should she be here?"

"I don't ask you why she should, because she shouldn't! I ask you, is she?"

Then Bob handed out the feeble lie: "Of course not!" He could not let ill enough alone. He tried to argue about it. "What on earth should bring her here?"

"She's crazy about you," Joe growled. "She don't understand these city ways. She comes from Gawd's country. You been triflin' with her affections, I reckon. And if you have, I— Why, I'd kill a man who fooled with her."

"Quite right!" said Bob; "quite right!" The duplication did not strengthen the comment. A child could have seen that Bob was ill at ease. Joe glared past him.

"Why are you standin' in front that do'? Is she in that room?"

"There's nobody in there," said Bob, in a cold sweat of rage at having to take Yarmy's insolent suspicions. He clenched his hands back of him to keep them from flying at Yarmy's face.

At that moment both he and Joe heard a movement in the other room. It was Zeb, who entered there from the hall with a small package of hair-pins and startled Kate as much as he startled Bob.

Joe stepped forward with new menace. "What's that?" he demanded.

"That?" Bob stammered. "Wh-why, why, that must be my man—my man Zeb. He—he went out. He must have come back."

Instantly Bob saw that he had only emphasized the awkwardness of the situation, for Joe sneered: "Oh, he's been out, eh? You sent him out, I reckon."

"Yes—no—that is—"

"Well!"

"For some—some tobacco. I sent him out for some tobacco."

"Agh! I don't believe there's a man in there at all."

Bob took a chance and raised his voice. "Zeb! Oh, Zeb, come here."

When Zeb put his head in to say "Yassa!" the door struck Bob in the back. Without turning Bob said, and pulled a graveyard smile:

"Mr. Yarmy thought you were his sister."

"No, sah. I ain't," said Zeb.

"That's all," said Bob, and Zeb withdrew, his eyes bulging. He turned them on Kate and he would have taken great pleasure in murdering her for the humiliation he saw his master subjected to. But he stayed by the door to hear what followed. He heard Joe say:

"I reckon I made a mistake. I apologize."

He heard Bob answer, with a sudden return of dignity, "You'd better apologize to your sister when you see her."

Joe was meek now. "I will. She's the best girl in the world, but she's a little too trusting." Then there was a tense hush and then a ferocious snarl from Joe: "What's this? It's her hat! She's here, after all. She's in there. Get out of ma way!"

Bob's answer was a resolute "No!" Joe's a loud "I'll kill you for this!"

## CHAPTER IX

THE horrified Zeb was roughly brushed aside as Kate darted wildly past him into the other room. She flung herself in front of Bob and pleaded:

"No, no! I'm here. But don't harm him, Joe. It's my fault."

Zeb, staring after her, saw Joe recoil from her. "Don't touch me! Good God! How could you come here?"

"I loved him."

Joe ignored her and turned the flood of his wrath on Bob. "Wha' d' I tell you? You led her on, you—"

Zeb did not hear the incoherent words that followed. He was running about frantically, searching for some weapon of defense for his master. He fumbled at the bureau; picked up a hairbrush; flung it down; a little pair of manicure scissors; tossed them aside; clutched instinctively at a razor; saw with disgust that it was a safety razor—a safety razor at such a time!

He jerked open the upper drawer. There lay a big pistol —a beautiful black automatic .45, the sweet, swift gun Bob had carried in the war.

Zeb would gladly have emptied it into Mr. Yarmy, but what did he know about machinery? There was a safety catch, and a sleeve to draw back to engage the first cartridge. Besides, Bob stood between him and the bull's-eye.

So he tiptoed forward to the open door and laid it gently in the upward palm of Bob's right hand, which his left was holding in fierce restraint.

It did Zeb's heart good to see Bob's fingers close about the grip with a loving welcome. He backed away unnoticed by Joe Yarmy, who was weeping in a murderous insanity.

Zeb heard Bob still trying to parley for Kate's repute:

"I assure you, Mr. Yarmy, your sister is innocent of any wrong. I give you my word of honor."

"Your word!" Joe laughed. "Your honor! Didn't you tell me she wasn't here and you hadn't seen her? Didn't you?"

"I was afraid you would misunderstand," Bob pleaded.

"Well, even if I was fool enough not to, who else would be?"

"Nobody else knows."

"Nobody else! Ha! The elevator-boy knows, don't he? The clerk down-stairs knows, don't he? And who was it put me wise to this but ma friend from Texas? He saw her come in here. He'll spread it all over Texas. She'll nevva be able to hold up her head again—and neither will I. I ought to kill her. I ought to kill you both—and by God, I will!"

He snatched an automatic from a shoulder-holster under his coat, but Bob had whipped his own weapon forward and covered him before he could aim his gun.

"Drop it!" Bob thundered with a voice used to military command.

The pistol thudded the rug as Joe fell backward in terror and knocked a chair over.

Zeb, witnessing the triumph he had shared in, hugged himself with joyous pride.

Kate wrung her hands in horror and confusion. Bob stepped forward quickly, picked up Joe's pistol and shoved it in his pocket.

He was white and sick with the shame of his triumph and the degradation that had preceded it. He wanted to vomit, and he glared at Joe Yarmy with a killing rage.

Kate gasped out in alarm. "Don't—don't hurt him!"

Bob felt none too kindly toward her for being the origin of the whole ugly business. He felt something like the knight at King Francis's court who went down into the lions' den for the lady's glove, but flung it in her face when he got back. He answered Kate with a rather icy chivalry:

"I won't hurt him if he behaves himself."

He was so much the master of the field that he resolved to clean it up. He said to Joe:

"Now, sir, do you still say I lured your sister here?"

Joe answered with the obstinacy of abject fright: "Yes! And you did, too, damn you. You did!"

"That's a lie," Bob said, "if Miss Yarmy will pardon my

language. You say I trapped her innocence—that's another. You say I have caused people to talk about her—that may be true. If it is, I can't say how sorry I am."

He could not even stoop to say that it was all her fault. She looked too wan and piteous to be blamed for what she had done. Bob was no Adam to tell on Eve. In fact, he began to feel a little more tender toward her for the very innocent impulsiveness that had brought them both to ruin.

Joe answered Bob's formal regret with a craven petulance:

"That don't square nothin'! Your tellin' me you're sorry don't get back her good name."

Bob considered this very solemnly. All the traditions of his Virginian ancestry; all the *noblesse-oblige* ideals they had brought over from England and from an old, old England, coerced him to a decision that meant a great renunciation of his every hope and plan, and was all the more compulsive for its devastation.

He sighed deeply, bowed low, and said in an almost venerable tone:

"I reckon that is true, sir. She is a good girl and I have compromised her."

"Yes, you have," Joe whined.

"Then I will marry her."

"Marry her?" Joe howled. Kate whispered, "Marry me?" and Bob bowed again with a courtesy of ancient fashion.

"If she will do me the honor of accepting my hand."

# Book IV
# HONOR GOES OUT

## CHAPTER I

THE glory of Bob's victory had sent Zeb into the rapturous glee of an overgrown pickaninny.

He had hardly been able to smother his giggles enough to listen to the earnest negotiations that followed. He had hardly understood what it was all about, for he had no respect for Kate Yarmy or her reputation, and he could not imagine why his master was taking her or it so seriously.

But he could not misunderstand the appalling fact that his master had just proposed to marry the woman.

Zeb had committed grand larceny and had been willing to commit murder to separate these two, and now—he was so stunned that he could not voice his resentment.

Then he heard Joe Yarmy, with a sudden backwash of his old insolence, protesting:

"Nah, you don't! Do you think I'm goin' to leave you make a monkey of me?"

"What's that?" Bob gasped, brought down from the sky-ish realms of courtesy to the hard-pan of reality.

Kate interposed with a request. "Mista Taxta, would you be kind enough to let me have a word with Joe?"

Zeb's sorrowful eyes saw Bob bend his back in another antiquated bow, and turn to enter the room where Zeb waited. He closed the door behind him.

Zeb saw in that adored young face such a look of despair as shadows the features of the doomed. Bob might have seen in Zeb's face the look a sad-eyed bloodhound fastens on the cold hand of a dead master.

Zeb impetuously shuffled forward and caught at Bob's pistol.

"What are you trying to do?" Bob asked.

"Gimme 'at gun," Zeb pleaded, "and lea' me kill them two scoun'rels."

Bob waved him aside with a gesture. "I'm much obliged

for the gun, Zeb, but, as you see, it hasn't any cartridges in it. I leave the clip out to avoid accidents. You can pack it up with the rest of my things."

"Pack it?"

"Yes, for I'm leaving town right away."

"Where you boun' for, Masta Bob?"

"Texas."

"O Gord! O Gord, he'p us all. You ain't meanin' what you sayin'!"

"If you want to go with me, keep quiet."

But Zeb could not keep quiet. He puttered about, mumbling prayers to Heaven and to Bob in rapid alternation.

If Zeb had not been pleading so desperately he might have heard what was being said in the other room.

When Bob left, Kate stared after him a moment, then turned on Joe a new mien, for her.

But Joe did not note her expression at first. He plounced into a chair and ridiculed himself and life with a sickly cackle:

"Well, I'll be— Don't this beat all hell? I'll tell the world it does. Instead of his coughin' up the cash he says, 'Bring on the parson'! The parson! We tried to work an old game on him, but he put over a new twist on it. You gotta give him credit for that. And the po' boob wants to marry you —'if you will do him the 'onna'! Oh, wow-wow!"

But Kate did not smile. A strange light seemed to play in her suddenly snowy features as she faltered:

"He was white enough to offer to marry me! Me! That's the real Southern chivalry you read about."

"Southern hellery!" Joe growled, his laughter snuffed out abruptly. "How we goin' to get out of this?"

"We're not goin' to get out of it," Kate answered. "We're goin' through with it."

Joe stared at her in a daze. "You're not thinkin' of marryin' him?"

Kate nodded.

He took the least argument first. "But McCann said we had to leave town to-night."

"That's so!" Kate mumbled, and her jaw dropped. Her face took on a look of childish tragedy, the look of a child that reaches out for a wonderful new doll only to find that

it is not for her; the look that a little pauper girl wears finding a sheet of plate-glass between her and a wonderful new doll.

If she had never repented the wickedness of her past before, she did so now. Her penitence may have been inspired, as many another wretch's, by the realization that the crimes of the past have risen up like a plate-glass window between the culprit and the heaven built for the innocent. But the penitence was all the more sincere for being selfish.

The word "McCann" brought a picture before her eyes, and she studied it in retrospect.

When she and Joe had left the Summerlin apartment they had had little to say. They were whipping their brains as if they were carpets to shake out the dust of mystery in the disappearance of the five thousand dollars.

They did not seek the imaginary Texan friend they had represented as so eager to purchase a share in their imaginary old homestead.

As they had wandered down Broadway in a state of common disgust and mutual exacerbation, they had been hailed unexpectedly by a sturdy citizen of large bulk whose cordiality they did not echo.

"Hello, Joe!" he murmured, smilingly, and added with more enthusiasm, "And as I live and breathe, it's my old friend Kate! Well, well!"

Kate and Joe answered, coldly, "Hello, McCann!"

McCann would not be snubbed. "I haven't seen you two in a coon's age. I never dreamed you were in town. Does the Skipper know you're here? I'll bet he doesn't. Come on down and have a little chat with the old man. What do you say?"

"We 'ain't got time," said Joe. "We're goin' out on an early train."

"Is that so?" said McCann. "Well, well! I don't blame you. With so many people in town, and the hot weather comin' on, and all, I don't suppose you'd find little old New York healthy. When were you thinking of leaving?"

"To-night," said Joe.

"Well, well! What train?"

"Six-four, Pennsylvania," Joe improvised.

"Going to give poor little Chicago a visit, eh? Give 'em

my love," McCann purred. "Always glad to see you both. I'll keep an eye out for you and tip the Skipper off. If you miss the six-four and happen to be in town to-morrow, he'll certainly want to see you, and he won't take 'No' for an answer. Well, so long!"

He waved to them amiably and smiled after them till they disappeared in the crowds.

McCann was one of those plain-clothes pests who spy upon the industry of the so-called "criminal classes," the original communists, who do not come out in the open as lovers of mankind with their Marxian and other radical theories that property is the curse of mankind and all capital is loot, but go about doing good in secret, confiscating stolen wealth as quietly as possible, and distributing it without unnecessary conversation or parade.

These agile benefactors find themselves constantly inconvenienced by detectives and other minions of tyranny. Joe had escaped their "camera eyes" somehow, up to now, since his uniform had served him as a perfect disguise, though the police were looking everywhere for men who wore it without right. Now he was a civilian again.

Kate, too, had found the crowds a good hiding-place. She could ordinarily spot a detective fifty yards away, and it was easy to hide her face by simply bending her head and lowering the shield of her broad hat-brim.

But to-day she and Joe had neglected to keep their eyes ahead. Their eyes were turned inward in meditation, and they had walked right into McCann's arms.

They were not inside The Dead-line at the time, and he was looking for more important fish to drift by, so he let them go on their promise to move on to some other village. But they knew that he would know whether or not they took the promised train. If they did not, the drag-net would go out for them. It was not wise to tamper with the police when they were amiable.

They had resolved to make one last drive at the balance of Bob's ten thousand. Only five thousand had vanished. A little blackmail had occurred to them as the one last swift chance. Bob had thwarted this plot, but had opened a new vista before Kate's fascinated eyes.

And now McCann looked amiable no longer. He loomed

as a fiend who barred her from paradise. He stood like a semaphore traffic cop ordering her to take a détour off the straight highway.

She remembered Joe's words, "the six-four." She glanced at the clock. The hands were just leaving three. Her face brightened instantly. She led an impromptu life.

"I've got time to get married and get the train, too, if we pep it up a little," she said.

But Joe was not interested in matrimony. "Agh, forget it! I'll tell him we spurn his dastardly offa—only money will soothe our outraged feelin's."

Kate was quite calm now. She broke open the package of hair-pins Zeb had brought, and stood by the mantel, putting up her hair by the mirror above it.

"He wouldn't fall for that line of talk, Joe. He's called our bluff. You can't get his money away without a gun. And he's got your gun—and your goat, too. He's too quick for you, Joe darling. A straight beats the little crooked hand you play every time."

"Well, all right. We can marry him and swipe his wad later, and lose him when you're tired of your new toy."

"I'm not goin' to lose him, Joe, or get tired of him. I'm damned tired of stallin' along with you. I'll swap any two of my pasts for one future with that boy. It's the first chance I ever had and I'm grabbin' it. They may have my picture in the Gallery, but out of this man's town I'll be as white as anybody."

Joe was convulsed with amusement at the abrupt transformation. He laughed silently and sneered.

"Where you goin' to pull off all this Little Eva stunt? We can't go back to Texas, either, you know."

"We can't. But I can—as Mrs. Robert Taxta. And, besides, there's oil in otha states."

Joe stared at her with puzzled mockery. "You're not lookin' to chuck me—for a handsomer man?"

"Handsome is as handsome does."

"What's he goin' to think when he finds out about this brotha and sista business of ouahs not bein' on the level?"

"Oh, I reckon he'll make the best of it, like the white man he is."

"Well, if that's how you feel about it, I won't stand in

your way. I'll pretend to be a little brotha of the rich as long as you slip me somethin' on the side now and then."

"Slip you some of ma husband's money!"

"Listen at her! 'Ma husband'! Say, you're kind of quick with that purity business, ain't you? Well, I gotta live, 'ain't I?"

She effaced him with a weary cynicism. "I don't know why."

"Is that so!" Joe snarled. "Well, then I blow the game right here and now."

She put out her hand. "I'll take care of you somehow, if you'll take care of me. But I hope you'll turn your hand to somethin' straight by and by, because, once I'm his wife —God! what a beautiful thing to be! His wife! His wife!"

"Easy on the sob-stuff!" Joe muttered. "We've got a train to make, and McCann is just as like as not to be tailin' us. If we try to pull off a weddin', he may put the parson hep."

Kate besought him meekly, "You'll lead him away and lose him, won't you, Joe—as a favor to me?"

"Then I wouldn't get to see you married! Oh, well, I nevva expected to, anyway. Go on and call out your bridegroom."

Kate inhaled the word as if there were incense about it: then she went to the door and tapped upon it with an unwonted shyness.

Bob came into the room with an effort at good cheer, and Kate told another of her farewell lies, each of which she hoped would be her last.

"I've persuaded my brotha to give up his ideas of revenge and let us be happy togetha. And I'm goin' to try to make you happy. There's one trouble. I told you we had to leave town to-night. If we don't, we—we might lose our home. You rememba my tellin' you? Do you reckon we could get married now and—and you could follow later? Could you, do you imagine?"

"I'll take the train with you."

"You will! but—"

"I think I'd rather. It wouldn't be very courteous to send my bride all that way alone. So if you don't mind—"

"If I don't mind!" Kate exclaimed, dazzled by the unbe-

nevable prosperity of her audacity. She had come here with a criminal purpose, and a good fairy was sanctifying and glorifying her with redemption.

Bob was unable to respond to the lilt in her voice. He took Joe's pistol from his pocket and restored it to its owner. Joe sheepishly accepted it and shoved it back into the holster. There was no need for words to the formal ceremony. Bob was as meek a conqueror as U. S. Grant, though Joe was no Robert E. Lee. He was sufficiently shamed, however, and Bob shifted the subject.

"What train are you taking, please?"

"The—the—" began Kate. She turned to Joe, who answered for her. "The six-four from the Pennsylvania Station."

"Then I'll take the six-four."

"You'll nevva make it."

"Oh yes, I can! It won't take me long to pack."

"Travel is so heavy it's uncertain about gettin' any reservation. There might be a drawin'-room turned back at the last minute, though. Shall I find out?"

"If you'll be so good." Bob was groping through clouds. "And then there's the preacher, of course! Who's a good preacher?"

"Oh, an alderman will do the trick," said Joe.

"The Taxters are always married in church," Bob answered. Kate adored him for this. Joe accepted it as another symptom of his insanity.

"Oh, well— But then there's the license. You both gotta drill down to the Municipal Buildin' to get that, and the bureau closes, I reckon, at five."

Bob glanced at his wrist-watch. "We can make it, I imagine—if we take the subway. Then we can come back to the—I reckon the Little Church Around the Corner is the best place. And we could taxi from there to the station. Could you telephone the minister?"

Joe did not mind the other jobs, but parsons were out of his line.

"Kate had betta do that," he said.

She was in a mood for talking to a preacher, so she nodded:

"I'll have to finish packin' and pay the hotel bill, and then I could come back. I'll have to rush."

Bob hesitated a moment, then he lowered his voice as he spoke to Joe; for Kate also.

"One thing more, please. Since I am marrying your sister, I'd like it to appear like—like other marriages. I want nobody to know the—the circumstances—especially not my mother— Oh, Lord! I've got to tell her!"

"You can write it to her," Kate said.

"But she's coming here any minute."

Bob was trembling like a leaf now. He had something to be afraid of. Now he knew cowardice. He could face the world with defiance, but a man cannot defy his mother. He can and does break her heart, but cravenly, not with defiance.

Kate had tact enough not to attempt to belittle his terror. She felt that he would prefer to be left alone with his shame. She laid a timid hand on his arm and murmured:

"I wish you loved me the way you love her. I'm goin' to try to make you learn how. But—well, I'll go get ready and telephone the minista, and come back for you as soon as I can."

"Thank you," said Bob, foggily.

Joe tried to be rid of the uncongenial solemnity. "I'll get the trunks off and get transportation and—and meet you at the nearest subway station, so's we can all go down to the Municipal Buildin' togetha."

"Thank you!" said Bob.

Kate and Joe had hardly left the room when there was a knock at the door that shook the mists away from Bob and brought the fearsome realities back.

He shivered with a reversion to childhood guilt and opened the door to admit his mother.

She came in, smiling and queenly, and he bowed his head before her as Cain might have drooped before his mother.

## CHAPTER II

MRS. TAXTER had not yet recovered from the blissful feeling that her boy had been reprieved from the grave of France.

She gathered him to her bosom again and kissed him with a prayerful gratitude that he was still alive.

"Well, honey, here I am. Who were your friends I saw just leaving you? Ratha pretty girl."

"Do you really think so, mother?" Bob demanded, with an eagerness that puzzled her.

She qualified her praise a whit: "A little too pretty, perhaps. Who is she?"

Before Bob could launch upon the dolorous sea of explanations Zeb came into the room. Bob had told his mother all he knew about the old man, and Mrs. Taxter welcomed the lost black sheep to the old fold again:

"This is Zeb, I suppose."

"Yassum! this Zeb. Howdy, ma'am, howdy! I admiah to find you lookin' so—so Taxta-like."

Mrs. Taxter laughed at the ready flattery. "And how does it seem to be back with us and working for my son?"

Zeb rolled his eyes. "Oh, Lawdy! it's jes' like workin' for his gran'pappy, only mo' so. He got the same domineerin' ways wit' men-folks and the same fibble ways wit' women-folks. Oh, Miss Lee, you jes' in time to save him. I cain't do nothin' with him. Mebbe you kin."

"Why, what's up now?"

"Them two Yah—"

But Bob broke in with a sharp, "I'll tell it!"

Zeb was frantic enough to be insubordinate. He appealed to the bewildered mother, "He won't tell it like I will!"

"Leave the room!" Bob commanded.

"You lea' me tell it!" Zeb protested, like a frightened child.

"Pardon me a moment, mother," Bob said, with a grim gentleness. Then he led Zeb by the arm into the next room and closed the door. He spoke to him as to a froward youngster. "Now look here, Zeb—if you ever belonged to our family—"

"Oh, you cain't doubt that!" Zeb cried, in an ague of terror.

"Well, then, you've been up North so long you've forgotten what the Taxters expect of their—their people."

"Oh no—I 'ain't!"

"Then here's your chance to prove it. You're too old for me to trounce; but I can turn you off. And I will unless you obey me in everything and obey me in silence."

Zeb was thoroughly cowed. He stammered: "I'm silence. You don't year me talkin', does you? I ain't sayin' a word."

"Then keep quiet and pack my things—everything—as fast as you can, for I'm going where you'll not want to follow me!"

"I'd follow you to the een' of this worl' and the nex'."

"I'm only going to Texas this trip."

"I'm right with you, Masta Bob."

"Well, I'm not sure you can get on the train. But I'll arrange for you and send for you later, on one condition—on one condition."

This bereavement and desertion horrified Zeb, but he would not protest. He listened to Bob's instructions humbly:

"So get me ready—and lay out my black morning coat and my silk hat and patent-leather shoes, for I'm going to be married before I start."

"Oh, Masta Bob, for the love of—" Bob gave him one look and he changed his tune to: "I'm silent. I ain't sayin' a word."

"Get my trunk packed and send it to the Pennsylvania—not to the Grand Central—at once! Understand?"

"The Centralvania, not the Grandsulpennsyl," Zeb babbled.

"No! The Pennsylvania."

"I got you, Masta Bob. I'll send 'em to the Grandest Central they is—I mean the Pennsylvaniest. Don't you worry 'bout that."

"By special express. If you can't get an expressman, take my things to the station yourself."

"Yassa. And I'm to lay out yo' funeral clothes—yo' weddin' clothes."

"And take my hatbox to the station with you, so that I can wear a soft hat on the train."

"Yassa, you'll sholy need a soft hat for that soft—heart of yourn."

"And take along my straw hat, too—and—and hurry up!"

Zeb nodded his head violently and Bob left the province where he could speak with despotic authority and entered the realm where he was a suppliant for mercy.

"Well, honey, what's all this excitement?" his mother asked. "You and your Zeb don' seem to understand each other ve'y puffectly."

Bob sighed to the depths of his being and spoke with complete dejection:

"It's pretty serious, mother, and I'm sorry to have to bring so much trouble on your beautiful head."

"That's what mothas' heads are for, honey," said Mrs. Taxter, cheerful through ignorance. "But first, tell me, is there a good jeweler near here?"

"A jeweler? There's one in this block, I reckon. Why?"

Mrs. Taxter, never dreaming that Bob had anything of real importance to broach, took a glittering handful of linked gems from her handbag. "I brought up this old necklace of diamonds and pearls—the one yo' gre't-grandfatha Taxta gave to yo' gre't-grandmotha. Your fatha gave it to me. It needs to be restrung and reset. I brought it up for you to give to the next Taxta bride."

"The next bride!" Bob gasped, dazed by the ironic appositeness of the necklace.

"Yes," she said, still unaware of the ominous atmosphere. "And speaking of the next Taxta bride, I invited April and her motha to meet me here."

Zeb had neglected also to tell Bob this news in the shower of excitements precipitated about his old head. And Bob had forgotten that his mother had spoken of her plan.

She was vexed at his stupid astonishment and she said, "I told you I was goin' to ask them to meet me here, and you said, 'All right.'"

Bob nodded and pressed his hand against his aching head. His brain and heart were both breaking under the stress put upon them by the results of his heedless chivalry. He felt that he would spend the rest of his life atoning for the odious consequences of that impulsive generosity. He vowed that he would never try to do the decent thing again.

One of his chief reasons for dashing off to Texas in such haste was his dread of facing April with the news of his wild act. He had sacrificed himself to save Kate Yarmy's good name, and now he realized that he had sacrificed also many precious things that were not his to dispose of as he wished. He had squandered his mother's happiness and her pride, and he had defaulted in April's claim upon him.

He felt a greater cowardice than before. He had no morale left. He was like one of those nerve-broken wretches whom "shell-shock" robbed of their courage.

When he thought of his mother he wanted to sink down and grovel in the dust. When he thought of April he wanted to run. In a frenzy of abject poltroonery he began to look wildly about for his hat. A man forgets honor, dignity, pain, everything, before he forgets his hat.

As he stood poised for stampede, there was a rat-tat of knuckles on the door. His mother waited a moment for him to open it, then, as the knock was repeated, called out:

"Come in!"

And in came April's mother, and April, and, after them, Pansy. All three ran to Mrs. Taxter as the new-come stranger and lavished upon her an affection of many years' ripening.

Bob was tempted to dart round them into the hall and away. But April held him fascinated.

She seemed to personify her name. She fell upon the harsh March of his heart like a very radiance of spring. She had changed her gown again, this time to conquer him with. And she succeeded.

Her shapeliness, her grace, the laughter in her fond voice made her beautiful beyond relinquishment. She belonged to him so wonderfully that it made him her chattel.

And yet the very preciousness of her made his bitter soul believe her unattainable, too precious a possession for a world all awry.

From the cluster about Mrs. Taxter Mrs. Summerlin was

the first to turn. She changed her smile of welcome to an expression of fitting sobriety as she gave Bob her hand and bad news:

"We've searched and searched and turned the house upside down, Bob, and we can't find that money."

Bob was so crushed beneath the later burdens that the first disaster of the black day seemed to be a trifle. He waived its importance.

"Oh, don't think of it."

April came forward shyly, remembering the morning's quarrel, which had not yet been formally absolved. She gave him a warm clasp of her lovable hand, and said, with an amiable mockery of humility:

"I've come to ask you for that property of mine you carried off—that ring you stole."

It went through Bob like a knife that she was asking to be his betrothed again. While he groped for words, he heard Pansy chattering to Mrs. Taxter as to the little girl she had dandled once upon a time:

"Lawd bress you, Miss Lee, you ain't one day olda than what you was. I 'clare you and my Miss Ma'y nevva is goin' grow up, is ye?"

"Grow up?" Mrs. Taxter groaned. "Look at my gray hair!"

"Pooh!" whiffed Pansy; "them's on'y brang on by that young rascal—like Miss Ma'y's is cause' by that wil' chile of hern. We-all ain't nevva goin' have no peace twell we gits them two married off an' outen the way."

"I reckon you're right, Pansy." Mrs. Taxter sighed. "I felt it in my bones, and that's why I brought this old Taxta necklace up, hoping I could get rid of it. April, you put this thing on and see how it fits you. It belongs round the throat of the next Taxta bride."

April's eyes were alight with the prospect of this decoration, and she waited only for Bob's "Amen!" to confirm it.

But the sight of the visible, tangible emblem of the marriage that was too beautiful to be woke him to the necessity for confession. At any moment Kate Yarmy would be hastening back to claim him and to prove him a traitor to everybody and everything.

He spoke up huskily: "Wait a moment, mother, please.

I've got something to say first." He saw Pansy eying him, and he could not humble himself before her. He said: "Oh, Pansy, you'll find your old friend Zeb in the next room. He's hard at work. You might help him."

Pansy took her dismissal with good grace and went into the bedroom where Zeb was making chaos out of the order he had so lovingly arranged. She stared at him in wonder:

"Well, Pafessa Taxta, I'm sent in yere to he'p you. What you packin' and where you takin' it?"

Zeb needed a fellow-sufferer, and he turned to Pansy with a woeful eagerness:

"Pansy, I'm what's packin' a heartload of trouble to carry fur and wide."

His sky had fallen about him and he had not caught a single lark. While he told Pansy of the woes of the day, on the other side of the door Bob made ready to unpack his soul of its mass of well-intentioned evils.

He was so long in approaching his exordium and so wretched of carriage that April thought to hearten him with a fuller confession. She drew him aside from the others and whispered:

"Bob, I want to apologize for my wretched temper this morning. If your mother had heard me she wouldn't have wanted to waste that necklace on me. I was just plain jealous. I didn't like that Yarmy woman one bit, and I couldn't endure the thought of your liking her. If you can forgive me—my finger is just homesick for that little ring again."

Bob took it from his pocket and tossed it in his restless hands, as if he were tossing a drop of glistening rain. A glistening drop or two fell from his eyes into the palm of his hand, and his story broke from him in disorder.

"Oh, April, April, why didn't you keep it on! Then they could have killed me before I would have—"

"Killed you?" April cried. "What are you saying, Bob? You don't mean that something has happened to prevent my getting the ring back?"

"Yes. It's too late. And now—now—do you remember what somebody wrote—about Launcelot, wasn't it? '*His honor rooted in dishonor stood and—and—*'"

April finished it for him:

"'*And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.*'"

"That's it," Bob sighed, desperate indeed to have taken refuge in poetry.

"But you're not Launcelot," April said.

"No, and she's not Guenever, but—well—I'm in the same fix."

"She's not Guenever? She who?" April asked, and Bob knitted his brows further.

"I don't know how I can explain it without being a worse cad than I am now, but—"

"Perhaps you'd better not explain it at all," said April, with an icy dread. "And perhaps it's not as bad as you think. I can't imagine you bein' a cad, Bob. I've accused you of lots of things, but never of that. Probably you just imagine it's worse than it is."

"No, it's as bad as it can be, and there's no way out of it."

Despair is the mother of bravery, and April smiled as she caught his hands and closed them upon the dancing ring and murmured:

"Then we'll both have to be as plucky about it as we can."

Mrs. Summerlin had been whispering to Mrs. Taxter a little history of the morning's quarrel. Mrs. Taxter had lived through so many April-Robert wars that she did not take this one seriously. She called Mrs. Summerlin's attention to Bob and April and their clasped hands.

"Look, they've made up again, as always."

She called out merrily:

"Now, Bob, you promised to tell us something terribly exciting. What is it?"

Bob released his hands from April's, put away the tantalizing ring, glanced at the clock to see how much time he would have before Kate might return, and began with another beginning:

"Sit down, mother—and Mrs. Summerlin—and April—and get your smelling-salts handy."

"What in Heaven's name?" Mrs. Taxter gasped as she sank into a chair.

"I thought it was in Heaven's name," said Bob, "but I reckon I was thinking of the wrong place."

## CHAPTER III

MRS. TAXTER looked at Mrs. Summerlin and at April to see if they had any hint of the mysterious secret Bob was so long in divulging. Their faces were blank with anxious ignorance.

Bob simply would not come to the point. He backed off and filled on another tack:

"Mother, you've often told me that your ma'iage with father was a love-match."

This sudden opening of a long, dim vista into the past softened Mrs. Taxter's eyes and her voice:

"Yes! Oh yes!"

"You told me, too, that your mother objected to him, and his father had a quarrel" [pronounced "quawl"] "with your father, who objected to you."

Mrs. Taxter smiled as over some Elizabethan comedy quaint with ancientry, and she nodded. Bob went on, encouraged by the acceptance of his premises:

"So you ran off and got ma'ied" (pronounced like a drawled-out "mad").

Mrs. Taxter confessed the outlawed crime: "Yes, my boy —it was a runaway match and ve'y happy."

She inhaled the incense of memory and sighed. "Heaven! while he lived." Bob left her a moment in the sacred fields, reluctant to drag her thence to his very sordid patch of thistles. He waited till she came back with a start and demanded:

"But you were going to talk about you—not me! Why do you ask these foolish old questions?"

"Because I wanted to see if you believed in runaway matches."

"Well, I can't say I do. Ouah case was most exceptional."

"Well, so is mine," said Bob, and, having reached his mark, like the aviator he was, pulled the lever and released the bombshell, "I'm going to run away, too."

Mrs. Taxter leaped to her feet. Mrs. Summerlin cowered in her chair. April clenched her every muscle like the hand of one who is utterly startled.

Bob pressed his mother back to her chair and sat upon the arm of it, embracing her to quell the panic that made her tremulous. His smile was ghoulish, and he felt the pride of a grave-robber caught by a searchlight:

"You remember the girl who left here just as you came in? You said she was very pretty." He explained to April, in a clammy voice, "Miss Yarmy, April, you know."

April's smile was sweet as uncoated quinine, "She's the Guenever you spoke of?"

Bob could neither defend his enforced bride nor permit her to be criticized. He spoke harshly, "She's to be my wife."

Now his mother began to fight him bodily and mentally, to struggle against his strong young arms as against his mad decision:

"Bob! Let me go! You don't mean it! You can't! You don't love her! You know you don't!"

When we dare not make statements we ask questions. Bob said, sternly, to protect his weakness, "Should I marry her if I didn't?"

Mrs. Taxter knew him well enough to cry with terrible intuition: "Of co'se you would. You'd marry anybody who made a claim on your generosity. But I won't permit it. She sha'n't have you."

Bob worshiped her for this. He wanted to bury his head in that tumultuous bosom of hers and weep his agony out. It was the bitterest part of the expiation he had to make for his knightliness that he had to massacre the heart of his mother and of April. He could only groan for mercy now. "Mother, I beg you!"

The anguish in his tone drugged her resistance.

Mrs. Summerlin began to tremble now for her own child's happiness. She faltered:

"Why, Bob, I always thought you and April—"

April's pride was in rags, but she would not play the beggar. She forced herself to be gentle and cheerful and matter-of-fact.

"No, mother, that's all over and done with. Bob and I understand each other perfectly. We are awfully fond of

each other, but we quarrel too easily, so we decided that we'd call all bets off and just be good friends. Bob's made a better choice and he's going to be very happy, I know."

Mrs. Summerlin wept feebly, as over a grave. "We always loved Bob."

Bob's mother was afraid of this thin little wail. It had a sympathetic vibration that her heart was all too well attuned to. So she hastened to pretend to indignation:

"When did this extraordinary—infatuation come ova you, Bob?"

"Very recently. It was a case of—of—"

Mrs. Taxter spoke the loathsome words for him. "Love at first sight?"

Bob nodded. Mrs. Taxter asked, "It isn't going to be a case of ma'iage at first sight, too, is it?"

Bob dropped another shell. "They're telephoning the minister now, she and her brother."

Mrs. Taxter broke free now and sprang to her feet in uncontrollable panic: "No, no, no! They sha'n't have you! There's something wrong about it all. You're not telling me the truth. I won't let you destroy yourself this way."

Bob was in a mood to destroy himself and all the people in the world and the world itself. For the first time in his life he understood why Samson, whose career had been similarly wrecked by a foreign woman, had taken a tremendous exultant delight in pulling the crowded temple down and burying himself under the wreckage. He envied Samson his majestic privilege. He did his best to imitate him now, and spoke with a deadly wrath at circumstance and all its victims.

"My bride is leaving for Texas to-night—immediately after our wedding, and I am going with her on the six-four train."

This wrecked his mother's commanding mood and reduced her to frantic appeal:

"Bob honey, my sweet boy, my darling child, you couldn't leave your poor old mother like this. You just couldn't. Afta I've come all this way to see you! You wouldn't, would you, honey? Say you wouldn't treat me so!"

Bob dashed his hand across his brow like a Cain trying to scratch away a brand new-seared. He pleaded:

"Mother, you're killing me. I've got to go. I've got to go. I'll come back soon. I'll come back rich. Don't make it any harder for me. Don't!"

This cry checked her again. A mother's woes must always yield place to her children's. She turned her eyes to April as the only reinforcements she could count upon.

April went forward into the trenches now as she had vainly wanted to during the war, to bind up wounds and distil courage from a heart full of terror:

"Now, Mrs. Taxter, you know it had to come. You know that mothers are never satisfied with the wives their sons select."

"Oh, if Bob had chosen you—"

"You'd have wanted to murder me in a week. You know my rotten temper and my wild jealousy, and, besides, I'm extravagant and lazy and selfish and—you'd have been as sick of me as Bob has been and would be."

Bob's heart was bursting with denials of this self-persecution, but how could he protest his eternal devotion to April at such a time? He had to let her go on, while she held his mother in her arms:

"It's all goin' to come out all right. Bob knows best. He'll come back rich and great, and he'll bring along a more beautiful wife than you expected. Miss Yarmy is a very handsome—"

She hesitated over "girl" and "woman," rejected both, but could not say "lady," and left the adjective suspended in air: "And everything will come out all right. You'll see."

Bob had to give some token of his gratitude. He mumbled, "God bless you—hon—" He could not call her "honey" any more. So he called her nothing.

Mrs. Taxter was weeping wholeheartedly now, but about his going away so far and so soon. April had an answer to this:

"If mothers had their way, you know, there'd never be any sailors or soldiers or anybody worth while, would there? You nearly died when Bob went into aviation. You were frightened to death when he went to France. Well, look at him now. He's lived through all that and is looking mighty well. You oughtn't to despair of his going through a little

thing like a first wedding. If this wedding doesn't turn out—why, we'll divorce him from that one and try somebody else."

Mrs. Taxter's diaphragm was uncertain whether it were called on for sobs or laughter, and her lips were twisted between smile and torment. The distance between tragedy and burlesque depends on the way you face. New York is about twenty-four thousand miles away from Brooklyn as you go west; but if you turn east you can get there in less than a minute by the subway. So Tragedy and Farce are but suburbs of each other.

Mrs. Taxter was on the suspension-bridge between the two when there was a knock at the door.

Bob's heart rapped his breast in the same rhythm. He was sure it was Kate come to claim him and to drag him from his family with a parody of the ancient bridal-battle.

Bob went to the door with the grace and humanity of one of those steam-men they used to show in dime museums.

But in stepped the brisk and radiant figure of Hugo Clyde, the broker, the born salesman. He came in speaking, with a running start that carried him some distance before he could check himself at the amazing sight of April, her mother, and a strange woman with Bob. What he said was:

"Mr. Taxter, pardon my intrusion, but your friend, Miss Summerlin, promised— Why, Miss Summerlin! I never dreamed of finding you here! And your dear mother! How charmingly you are both looking. Really, it's wonderful! You remember, Miss April, the last time you saw me, you promised me that I should meet Mr. Taxter as soon as he landed, but I waited in vain, and finally I took the liberty of coming to see him myself. I found out from your old camp your present address, Mr. Taxter. I didn't stop to have my name sent up, but—if you'll allow me to introduce myself, Mr. Taxter, I am Mr. Clyde, Hugo Clyde. Very much at your service—but—I hope I'm not intruding."

Nobody said anything. Everybody was lost in the clouds of his words. He had filled the air with them like a vocal squid.

Bob let go the door and woodenly took the hand that Clyde held out. He left the door open. April had never spoken to Bob of the fellow who called her "Miss April" and her mother "dear."

April simply could not speak, either to rebuke the offensive Clyde or to explain him to Bob. So Clyde began again:

"You see, Mr. Taxter, I presume I should say lieutenant —we've all heard of your wonderful exploits—but—well— Miss April was asking my advice about investments. I may say that that is my business—investment securities. And she was at a loss where to put her money, and happened to mention that you would probably be looking about for a place to invest—I believe it was ten thousand dollars, wasn't it?"

"It was," said Bob, dismally.

The imp that inhabited April skipped back into the heart whence despair had banished it. She could not help saying:

"Mr. Taxter has lost half his money and all his heart."

"Oh, so sorry! or should I say, congratulations?" chirped Clyde, with all the lovable quality of an English sparrow at daybreak.

Bob rolled him a glance that suggested his willingness to commit murder upon him, and April, taking a Grecian delight in following high tragedy with low comedy, said:

"Mr. Taxter is getting ma'ied this afternoon. Perhaps he'd rather have you for his best man than his broker."

Clyde understood instantly, and, like other instant-understanders, understood all wrong:

"Oh, I see! I see! I've broken in on a bridal-party. You told me that Mr. Taxter had a margin on your heart, and would probably be a relative by marriage."

This was punishment enough for April's levity. She flushed with shame.

"Nonsense! I said no such thing. Mr. Taxter is marrying a Miss Yarmy, from Texas."

Clyde recovered with splendid resilience:

"Ah, indeed! Fine! Fine! I wish you all the joy in Texas. I should be delighted to serve as your best man, if you wish me to."

"No, thanks!" said Bob, ominously.

Clyde turned from him to April with blithe audacity: "That means, then, Miss April, that you are not to be Mrs. Taxter—as I feared. May I—er—"

"You may not!" said April.

Bob still stood by the open door. Even Clyde's thick skin felt the frost forming, and he said:

"Well, I won't detain the bridegroom. But I'll call on you soon, Miss April—and on you, dear Mrs. Summerlin. Good-by all. Bon voyage, Mr. Taxter!"

And he frisked out.

Bob stared at April. His heart was still hers so completely that he was ingenuous enough to plead:

"Promise me you won't marry him, April?"

April stared at him in an amazement that he misread as a rebuke for his Mormonism. He blenched and apologized:

"I forgot. Forgive me!"

He had not yet closed the door. And now Kate Yarmy blew in through the aperture breezily.

"Oh, Bob!"

She was going to add, "The parson's on the job." But she saw the room full of women. And she felt ambushed.

She checked her speech, recognizing Mrs. Summerlin and April as inveterate enemies with a nod, and looked at Mrs. Taxter, whom she assumed to be Bob's mother, with a stare of mingled dread and defiance.

Bob said: "Miss Yarmy, let me present you to my mother. You know Mrs. Summerlin and Miss Summerlin."

Kate ignored them and turned to Mrs. Taxter with an effort at a smile that faltered away before the chill of Mrs. Taxter's gaze. She stammered:

"I—I—as we say in Texas, I admiah to meet you. But I'm afraid you won't like me."

Mrs. Taxter tried to be polite at least. "Anybody that my boy is so fond of must be—must be—"

"Isn't it strange?" Kate broke in, nervously. "Who could believe it? Joe, my brotha—told Bob—" The unfamiliar name came with effort from her, and shocked the bridegroom almost as much as his mother—"Joe told Bob that we had to rush back home on the first train, and Bob, the dear boy, just insisted on havin' the weddin' at once so's he could go along. Didn't you, Bob?"

"Yes, Miss—yes, dear."

Mrs. Taxter observed, "It's a little sudden, isn't it?"

"Oh, isn't it?" Kate agreed, to Mrs. Taxter's intense

discomfort. She felt a sort of promiscuity in sharing the same phrase with this hateful and hatefully pretty serpent. Kate went on, "It was all so sudden that Joe—my brotha—was strongly opposed to it."

"He was!" said Mrs. Taxter, with a sudden interest in this sympathetic brother.

"Indeed he was!" Kate exclaimed. "But Bob insisted. Didn't you, dea'?"

"Yes—yes, indeed!" Bob mumbled. Every man has his braveries and his cowardices, and this wearer of a cross of war was an arrant skulker in this field as the lone man and prize of battle among four women. He took to his heels with a feeble excuse: "I—I haven't begun to pack yet. If you'll all excuse me a few minutes."

Before he could be seized he vanished into the bedroom where Zeb and Pansy stared at him as if he were the dead walking. They had made little progress in storing his things into the gaping trunk, and he scolded them with a vigor he had been unable to display in the other room.

He looked in a closet for his morning-coat, so called because it was chiefly worn of afternoons, having driven the old frock-coat into disrepute. He stared at it for some time before he could collect enough wits for its recognition. Then he went about, gathering black socks and a white shirt, as if he were a somnambulist. He carried them into the bathroom, which was the only dressing-room he had left, with all this throng in attendance. He felt as if he were holding a wake, with himself the corpse. He set about dressing for his own obsequies in an appropriate mood.

And now for the battle of the women, met like four hungry female jungle-cats over a trapped hartebeest—old lioness, old tigress, and tigress cub, and young, lithe leopardess; all relentless, cunning, patient.

Kate was one against three, but she had certain advantages that she would not hesitate to use. But what gave her most unexpected courage was the sight of the Taxter necklace lying on the table where Mrs. Taxter had laid it when Bob prevented her clasping it about April's neck.

There are few women whom the sight of a diamond does not quicken and intoxicate. This shimmering Pleiad of

them wakened in Kate a wanton eagerness that had goaded her to crime before.

With a husband, an honorable name, and a diamond necklace as her quarry, she was ready to match wits or fangs and claws with any earthly power, peculiarly ready to fight with females for a male.

## CHAPTER IV

THERE is probably no pang given to mortal woman to bear greater than yielding her son to another woman. It is a second travail, without the joy of gain—with all the grief of loss. She may smother her cries, but there are tears running back into her heart.

To give a son away to his school is hard; to see his ambition becoming his second love is hard; to devote him to his country is a kind of glorious sorrow; but to hand him over to a wife is downright agony.

In the first place, no woman could possibly be good enough for him. If he is a very bad boy, the woman is still more under suspicion, for then she ought to be good enough to make him better than his own mother could make him. And, of course, if she did that, she would become hateful beyond hate.

Bob Taxter's mother was very mother. She loved a son with a Virginian extravagance of tenderness and admiration. She was never afraid to spoil him with adulation. She wanted him to feel that, however much praise outsiders might lavish on him, it would never equal what he had had at home long before.

Mrs. Taxter had accepted the prospect that April would marry Bob. She had accepted it lightly when they were children and far from the fatal day. As they grew older, their quarrels continued unimportantly and amusingly childish. She loved April, and she respected April's people and her ancestry and their ways. April had displayed all her good and evil traits until both had become pleasant with familiarity.

Surrendering Bob to April would not be really surrendering him. It would be simply a continuance of the sharing arrangement that she and April had kept up since Bob was a little boy and April a little girl.

But now Bob was going to do one of those terrific things

that sons do to their mothers' hearts and hopes. He was going to give his freedom, his career, his name, his love, his lifelong days and nights into the monopoly of a Miss Nobody from Nowhere.

Mrs. Taxter had despised Kate before she saw her. She loathed her at first inspection. She resented her the more for the insult of beauty added to the injury of abduction.

Then, there was about Kate, her features, and her carriage, too, an undisguised voluptuousness that was disgusting, an effrontery. It horrified Mrs. Taxter to think that her son could have been influenced by it. It was a kind of damnation, and she felt that it was her religious duty to drive this Lilith out of Eden.

When a religious ardor is added to hostility it sanctifies every trick; it grants plenary indulgence in advance for any atrocity.

But for all her hatred, Mrs. Taxter was equally beset with paralyzing fears. What weapons has a mother to wield against youth and prettiness, passion and novelty? She has only the rusty foils that have hung over the fireplace and grown brittle, while the young enemy has the hot, keen, flaming swords of forbidden Edens challenging to enterprise; the fierce bayonets of desire; strange siren musics; enervating clouds of perfumed enchantments, and maddening bugle-calls to the blood.

It has been eternally decreed that the mother shall be conquered or destroyed who ventures out on this field of courtship and tries to drag her young back to the home they have outgrown.

Mrs. Taxter was a lioness, but she felt old and awkward, and she could not trust her own cub. He had a new loyalty, and he would not thank her if she marred her adversary.

Mrs. Summerlin was hardly more than a witness. She was constrained by the very pride in her daughter that this new-come woman outraged. She could not fight for Bob as if he were her daughter's last hope of a man.

April was Kate's superior in every point but one. She had better wits, better bravery, more physical power. If she could have been maddened to it she could have torn Kate to pieces or throttled her to death by the sheer force of her splendid muscles.

But she wore the shackles of conventional training. She had kept her claws sheathed so long that they had lost their spring. As for her fangs, she was very dainty about what she set her teeth in.

She was quivering with primeval instincts, but the inhibitions of good breeding held her in check.

Kate, however, had fought from childhood with tooth and nail. She had torn out other women's hair in tufts, scratched constables, and bitten policemen till their knuckles bled. That very plain-clothes man, McCann, who had warned her and Joe to leave New York, still carried a scar from Kate's teeth. She had tried to chew his right thumb off once in a scrimmage, and he had had to put her "out" with his left fist before he went out with the pain. He rather admired her for her grit, but he wanted no more battles with her.

April did not know of Kate's indescribable past, but she would not have been surprised at any part of it. She had a woman's flair for another woman's evil propensities, and had abhorred Kate from the first glimpse of her.

She would as soon have bitten or scratched a hyena as attempted violence on Kate. She hoped only to bluff her away. She did not know General Grant's watchword, "Remember that your enemy is always as afraid of you as you are of your enemy."

She did not know that Kate also was suffering from inhibitions. Kate was sniffing the catnip of respectability. She wanted to revel in it. She realized that any physical damage she might do to her three enemies would undo her more than flight. If she fled, Bob might follow; but if she fought, he might join his own family.

She held him by a frail cord. To insult his mother or lacerate the beauty of his April would immediately set him free from any sense of obligation.

And so the battle over this prey, like so many wild and tame animal encounters, resolved itself into a sham battle of circling and prowling, feinting and retreating, fierce grimacing and back-arching, and no blood shed. The women hated one another venomously, but were more afraid of wounding than of being wounded.

There was a prolonged silence after Bob left the room be-

fore anybody spoke. Mrs. Taxter opened her lips several times, but every impulsive outburst was stifled by a second thought. At last she appealed to April to open the battle:

"April, reason with her! Plead with her!"

As the champion of Bob's mother, April could fight with better grace. She began to parley:

"Miss Yarmy, can't we prevail on you to—to give up this mad plan?"

"Why should I?"

"At least postpone it!"

"Just to oblige you?"

"No; for the sake of his mother."

"I'm fond of him, too."

"But he doesn't—he can't love you."

"Did he tell you that?"

"No, but—"

"I didn't think he was the sort of a man to talk about his wife."

"You re not his wife!"

"But I'm going to be inside of an hour!"

"In spite of his not loving you?"

"Where do you get that stuff? Of course he loves me. You saw it yourself. It made you so jealous you wanted to kill me, didn't it?"

April whitened with the shame of this.

Kate grew more cruel. "He didn't want to tell you how he loved me. He never told you how he tried to kiss me, did he? Of course not. He did, though—lots of times. But I wouldn't let him. Not that he isn't fond of you. He always spoke well of you—as a friend. But he's known you too long, girlie, to love you. A man don't want to marry a girl he grew up with. I'm not in your class. I know that without your telling me. But I'm something new. I'm different to him. And so is he to me. And maybe that's why I love him."

April lifted her downcast head at this with an eagerness that revealed her real love for Bob. "But do you love him?"

"Better than you ever did!" Kate cried. "I'd go through hell for him. I'm goin' through it now, fighting you all. But I'm going to get him in spite of you. And I'll be a good wife to him, too!"

Mrs. Taxter made an impatient gesture of protest at the possibility of such a woman's being a good wife to her son. Kate saw the motion and turned to Mrs. Taxter, accusing April.

"Don't you forget that she played fast and loose with him first. She threw him over before he ever suggested marryin' me."

"That isn't true!" Mrs. Taxter retorted, and then turned to April. "Is it, April?"

April confessed, "We did have a little dispute."

Kate broke in. "And it was over me!" She whirled on April. "You gave him back his ring, too, didn't you? I saw you when you did." She whirled on Mrs. Taxter. "Just because Bob wanted to buy a share in ouah oil propaty. She tried to prevent him. She got so mad at him she flung down his ring and told him to invest that, too. Somehow, the five thousand dolla's Bob had has disappeared. Nobody knows how. I'm not saying she took it, but I'd like to hear what she'd say if the money had vanished in my flat like it did in hers. Ha! She wouldn't say a thing about me, oh no! Anyway, she ripped off his ring and gave it up. And he put it in his pocket. I reckon he's got it now."

April knew that he had it. She had seen him juggling it. She was rash enough to say, "He didn't give it to you, though."

"Not yet, but he will. Or you can have it if you want it. But you can't have him!" Kate felt so victorious that she ventured a little crass patronage, "Come on, be a good sport; take your medicine." She even put her hand out toward April's arm.

April recoiled with a shudder of contaminated aristocracy and gasped:

"Please don't!"

Kate laughed with robust bourgeoisie, but she was hurt. "That pride of yours won't get you anything. It's lost you Bob already. You better can that high-and-mighty business."

Even Mrs. Summerlin grew ferocious at the sight of April being lectured by this upstart. She snapped:

"Young woman!"

"Old lady!" Kate mocked. This touched springs of instinctive wrath and April nearly sprang upon her then.

But even Kate deplored the plebeiance she could not suppress. She hastened to withdraw it.

"I beg your pardon. I'm a little excited. You see, I nevva was married befo'. I know how you-all hate me, but—"

Mrs. Taxter would not let her presume upon even so much respect as hate implied. She interposed, "I don't know you well enough to hate you—yet."

Kate acknowledged the "yet" with a bitter laugh: "I get you. But don't lose sight of one thing, ladies." She wished she had not called them "ladies." "If I was an angel from heaven—which I'm not, by a long shot—you'd hate me for takin' yo' son away from you. Yo' own motha-in-law must have hated you, Mrs. Taxta. And I'll bet you hated her. It's only natural. If I have a son, I'll want to poison the woman who marries him, whoevva she is."

Mrs. Taxter almost swooned at the thought of being grandmother to a son of this woman's. Kate went on, "If Miss Summalin had have married Bob, you'd have hated her just as much as me."

"Nevva!" Mrs. Taxter threw her arm about April.

"Oh yes, you would! But she's not goin' to marry him, so you can stay friends."

Mrs. Taxter took her arm from April.

Mrs. Summerlin tried the effect of prayer:

"Miss Yahmy, the thing Mrs. Taxta objects to most is the suddenness of it all. Don't you suppose you could put off the wedding for—a few days, at least, till the announcements could be given out and—and a pretty ceremony arranged in a chu'ch?"

"Oh, Bob insisted on the chu'ch. But I've arranged for it. This isn't any shot-gun affair in a justice-of-the-peace's office, you know. You-all are very cordially invited to come daown to the Little Chu'ch Raound the Cawna."

"But Mrs. Taxta doesn't belong to that chu'ch," Mrs. Summerlin pleaded. "Wouldn't you ratha have a beautiful wedding in the old chu'ch down in Virginia?"

"I'd just love it, but you see I've got to go to Texas this evenin'. I've just got to."

Mrs. Summerlin was tenacious. She felt that she was succeeding a little. "Then why not postpone the wedding till you can come back?"

Kate tossed her head in gay scorn of this subterfuge. "And leave Bob alone with you-all? Why, you'd have us divo'ced befo' we were ma'ied."

Mrs. Taxter took up this challenge with a new gentleness. "No, no! My son's happiness is all I have to live for. If he wants you for his wife, I'll do all I can to make you both happy. If you'll just call yourselves engaged for a while, and then come home to the plantation and be ma'ied from there, you shall have the most beautiful wedding I can arrange, and no end of wedding-presents; and my gift will be—this."

She took up the crumpled necklace and spread it out in the air in all its resplendence. The light of the jewels seemed to be mirrored in Kate's flashing eyes.

"What is it? A—a family heirloom?"

"Yes. It is always worn by the Taxta brides."

"Thank you evva so much!" And she put her hand out for it. Mrs. Taxter recoiled from her as April had done. Kate pressed her claim with miserly greed: "It's mine, ain't it? For I'm to be the next Taxta bride—ain't I, Bob?"

This to Bob, who put his head in at the door just at the wrong moment. In the sound-proof bathroom where he had been scouring himself and putting on fresh linen for his honeymoon, he had wondered what havoc the women who disputed his possession had made of one another.

He had put his head once or twice into the room where Pansy and Zeb tiptoed about like pallbearers, but had heard no shrieks or thuds from the living-room. At last his curiosity drove him to whipping into a bathrobe and going to the door. He interpolated his head in time to receive Kate's appeal for corroboration. He was rather surprised to see all four women still alive and calm, with their hair and clothes unrent and no visible marks of finger-nails.

Kate's question struck him as rather belated and unnecessary, but he could only answer:

"You were; the last I heard."

"But you're not dressed! We'll nevva get the license unless you rush."

He answered, as peevishly as if he were already wed:

"I'm rushin', but I've got to get my clothes on, haven't I? Mother, you'll meet us at the church, won't you? You know where it is, don't you?"

"I can find it, I reckon," his mother sighed, and gave up the battle. When Kate said, "But the necklace—do I get the necklace?" Mrs. Taxter felt that diamonds and like vanities were such nothings compared with the theft of her son that she lost all interest in them. She said, "I'll bring them with me."

"You might be late or miss the place," Kate urged, shameless in her lust for the gems. "Why don't you give them to me naow?"

Mrs. Taxter made a last feeble struggle. "The necklace is so old it will fall apaht. I was going to take it to a jeweler's to have it reset."

"There's a fine jewelry-sto' in Houston," Kate persisted.

"Oh, ve'y well!" She was about to pass the sparkling concatenation over to the exigent bride, but she feared that it would break and scatter. She said to Bob, whose face was still stuck in the door crevice like a stupid moon: "They ought to be wrapped up. See if you haven't a box for them, Bob."

She poured the fortune into the hand he thrust through the door. She preferred that if they must be wasted on the Yarmy creature, Bob should have the credit, and the blame, for the gift.

Bob turned and called on Zeb: "Find a box for these and wrap them up. Be mighty careful."

He decanted the liquid into Zeb's liver-colored palms, and turned back to urge his mother and Kate to be gone. He had an idea:

"What about the ring? You have to put on a ring, don't you?"

"It's still being done," said his mother.

"But I haven't one," Bob said, half hoping that this might render the whole ordeal impossible. But Kate was resourceful:

"I'll run out and get one, and slip it to you in the subway. You're to meet Joe and me there—he's waiting naow, I'll bet. Give me the necklace and I'll hunt up the ring."

"Wait till I get you the money," said Bob.

Kate answered, jubilantly: "What's youahs is mine, and what's mine's ma own, from naow on. I'll buy the ring and swap it for the necklace. Where is it at?"

Bob turned back to Zeb, who had scurried about, found a long, lean box of lawn ties, emptied it, laid the necklace in, and turned to ask Pansy to hand him a piece of heavy wrapping-paper from the floor.

Necklaces have a serpentine gift for squirming free of any confinement. As Zeb turned and unwittingly opened the box a little, the necklace glided out and slid down the back of a tufted chair into the crevice between the seat and the arm.

Zeb closed the box, rolled it up in the paper Pansy handed him, demanded a string, tied a few sorry knots in it, and handed it over to Bob with deep regret.

Bob passed it through the door into Kate's clutching hand. She was so enraptured in the possession that she fled lest some one should get it away from her:

"Good-by, all. Hurry up, Bob!"

April wanted to laugh at her haste and to weep at her victory. But she simply wreathed an elegy into a smile and murmured to Bob: "I'll be running along now, Bob. Good-by! I hope you'll be mighty happy. You know that!"

Bob shook his head with a rueful skepticism, put his arm through the door, and wrung April's dear old hand. Mrs. Summerlin simply nodded farewell, her eyes abrim with tears. Bob did not dare invite her or April to the wedding. He wished to be rid of his mother, too.

"I'll see you again, mother—at the church. The man at the desk down-stairs will tell you where it is. I don't know exactly myself."

His mother wailed the familiar phrase we use so incessantly with such heedless incongruity, "All right!"

## CHAPTER V

BOB watched them close the door after them. Then he turned and went back to the bathroom to shave and finish his self-valetry. He was surprised to see that he had left his roll of money on the glass shelf, alongside his tube of shaving-cream. He was still more surprised to find it still there. He counted over the rest of his cash. Besides the half of his legacy, he had a hundred and fifty dollars.

Pansy, realizing that Mrs. Summerlin had gone, was lingering for a last outburst. She glared at the bathroom door. "Oh, the young scoun'rel that he is!"

"Don't abuse ma boss!" said Zeb. "That boy's got the rightest heart and the wrongest haid evva a man had. Nobody nevva could do nothin' with them Taxtas when they get them shiftless shiftlery notions in they minds."

"Ma po' Miss April!" Pansy moaned.

"And po' you, and po' me, and po' evvabody! Oh, this weddin' has got to cease ef I has to cease it maseff."

Pansy sniffed. "You look like what's goin' to cease somethin'!"

"It's gotta be did; it's gwineter be did!"

"How you gwine did it?"

"I d'know, but ef prayin' like a camel an' lyin' like the devil can do it, I'll do it. Ef you got any infloonce, Pansy, you pray the Lawd to miss him that ol' train."

Pansy was a practical believer. "Ef you was lookin' for to miss him a train, betta turn back that clock, and that watch, too."

Zeb hailed the plan with joy. "Now you's ma Pansy! Three haids is betta than one." He ran to the mantel where the hotel clock scowled, opened the case and pushed the hands back an hour recklessly as he murmured: "Goo'-by, Pansy Blossom. I'll drap roun' and see you lata!"

Pansy went to the door and growled: "If you don't miss

him that train, don't you nevva do come roun'. No matta how late will be too soon."

Pansy closed the door and left Zeb to his own resources. He felt terribly outnumbered by the fiends of circumstance. He had never felt so old and stupid and timid. He had nothing in his favor but a recklessness of consequences. To be beaten and cursed would not matter, provided he could devote himself to the salvation of his young master. His was the spirit of the higher obedience which prefers many small disobediences to a servile connivance in a bad result.

He hobbled in his negroid way to the bureau where Bob had left his watch. Zeb turned back the hand half an hour.

Bob popped out of the bathroom just a second too late to catch him at it. Bob spoke through a lathery shaving-brush dancing about his cheeks:

"That trunk of mine. Send it to the station right away—get a special expressman!"

"Yassa!" said Zeb, limping telephoneward.

Bob called after him: "And get the rest of the things in. If the porter can't get it to the station, you'll have to take it in a taxi."

"Yassa!" Zeb called into the telephone: "Gimme the po'ta. . . . This you, Mistoo Po'ta? This Mistoo Taxta's room. I want a 'spressman right this minute—a 'spressman for a yalla trunk about so long. Do I get him? You come a-runnin' for the trunk."

Bob came out of the bathroom again. "Is he coming?" Zeb nodded. "Don't get things mixed now. Put everything in except my black clothes. I'll wear those."

"Yassa! You'll sholy need yo' black clo'es. Is these them?"

"Yes. Leave them out, and everything else goes in the trunk—except what goes in my suit-case to wear on the train—pajamas and linen and things. I'll pack that myself and you can meet me at the station with it."

"Ain't I goin' to see yo' weddin'?"

"No."

"Us Taxtas usurally goes to our folks's weddin's," Zeb pleaded, cherishing a vague idea that he might, as a last resort, forbid the ceremony to proceed—or steal the parson—or something.

"You can see my next wedding," Bob snapped, as he went back to his mirror with his razor.

"May it come soon!" Zeb muttered.

He had an inspiration that thrilled him with its high-handed impudence. He picked up Bob's black suit, also the blue serge which he had laid out to carry in the suit-case, and spread them both in the trunk.

He stuffed in with them the patent-leather shoes and everything else the trunk would hold, including an overcoat. He kept peeking into the bathroom to see if Bob were watching, but he was engrossed in his daily battle with a patch of cross-grained stubble that grew beneath his left jawbone.

The porter now rapped on the door leading to the freight-elevator. Zeb closed the trunk, locked it, pocketed the keys, and dragged the trunk to the door, which he opened.

The porter yanked the trunk to one end, fastened a claim-check on the handle, and asked:

"What station?"

Zeb felt quite sure, but not absolutely. He went to the bathroom and asked, in a low voice:

"Masta Bob, what station you say that ol' trunk goin' to —the Gran' Central?"

"No, you idiot—the Pennsylvania!"

"Yassa!"

He hurried to the door, where the porter said, "What station did he say—Penn—"

"No, you— He say the Gran' Central. You take that to that Gran' Central the fastest you kin!"

"O. K. And there's the claim-check."

"And there's half a dolla' for speed."

Zeb pocketed the claim-check and closed the door, leaning against it and looking upward, white-eyed, as if expecting a lightning to blast him for his treachery.

As he staggered across the room to pack the suit-case, his eye was caught by the little pool of diamonds in the big armchair. He went to it in amazement, stooped down, and lifted up the necklace with awe, talking to it softly:

"What's you-all doin' thah? How you git outen that ol' box? You don't like them Yahmys any better 'n what I do, does you? Well, the Lawd done this, not me. That means

He's right with me, and mebbe Him and I goin' do some mo' miracles."

He wondered where he could help the Lord to hide it. His wandering eyes caught the glint of the vacuum-cleaner container in the corner of the room.

Casting another glance into the bathroom, he saw that Bob's face was buried in a hot, wet towel. So he ran hastily, lifted the lid of the container, and spilled the Taxter diamonds into the rubbish where Bob's first five thousand dollars still slept.

He had just set the lid back when Bob charged out of the bathroom, very smooth of cheek, but greatly rumpled in temper. He glanced at his watch and gave a gasp of relief. He had shaved in a good deal less than no time at all. But he was too excited to consider the paradox.

He kicked his slippers toward Zeb, who was puttering at the suit-case.

"Put those in the suit-case and hand me my black-silk socks."

Zeb looked everywhere for the black-silk socks. Then he stood trembling.

"What kind of socks was them black silks?"

"Black silk, you poor imbecile!"

Zeb cowered in readiness to be smashed with some missile as he faltered:

"I reckon I done put them ol' socks in that ol' trunk!"

Bob shot up like a geyser, "My God! I told you to leave out the black things."

"I'm mighty so'y. I must 'a' got you all wrong."

'Where are the brown ones, then? I'll have to wear brown ones—and with my morning-coat—awful! Where are they?"

Zeb found the brown ones, to his surprise. He had overlooked them. He handed them to Bob from as great a distance as possible.

Bob shoved his feet into them and locked his garters on. "Now my black shoes!"

"Black shoes?" Zeb echoed. "The shiny ones?"

"Yes."

"In the trunk!"

"Oh, my G— Where is it?"

"The trunk? Where's the trunk?"

"Yes!"

"Done gone!"

"Call it back!"

Zeb went to the door and looked out. If the porter had been there Zeb would have denied his eyes, but the little back hall was empty.

"Not in sight."

"Telephone the porter!"

Zeb went to the telephone very slowly. To his horror, the Central answered at once, but Zeb kept whacking the hook and shouting, "Hello!" while she howled back at him, "Order, please!"

He hung up the receiver in despair and uttered a phrase very much in vogue at the time:

"Sence the waw the telephome suvvice is jest onspeakable!"

The Central rang the bell and Zeb said: "Hello! Is that you? Whah you bin at all this time? Gimme the po'ta!" When the porter answered Zeb ignored him as long as he dared, then asked for the trunk. To his delight it had left the hotel.

Bob was fuming with helpless wrath. "I'd flay you alive if I had time. Now I've got to wear brown shoes at my wedding."

In the words of the cartoonists, "The worst was yet to come." Zeb realizing this, and wondering what would be left of him in the hour of wrath, insinuated:

"Hadn't you betta put off the weddin' till you get some shiny shoes?"

"Shut up, and put the buttons in my shirt. No, find my top-hat. No, get the shirt fixed. I'll look at the hat."

He ran to the hat-box while Zeb took the pins out of the shirt. He expressed another familiar thought of the day:

"I wonda where they git the time to put all these pins in these yere shirts."

When the pins were out he took his time about finding the buttons. He put the cuff-buttons in so that the cuffs were turned the wrong way, and when the impatient Bob seized the shirt and forced his way into its creaking interior

he found the cuffs protruding foolishly from his wrists. He ripped the shirt off with wild profanity. He fixed the buttons himself, muttering at Zeb so balefully that Zeb protested:

"Masta Bob, you goin' git me rattled in a minute."

"You're going to get your teeth rattled in a minute," Bob raged. The day of beating slaves had gone long before Bob's birth, but the language still remained a part of the idiom.

Zeb took up the silk hat that Bob had bought to wear to the theater with April. Its sheen was broken here and there, and Zeb began to turn it on his sleeve.

Whether intentionally or not, he rubbed it the wrong way and turned its gloss to fuzz before Bob noted it and emitted another roar. Zeb was no Ajax, but he was certainly defying the lightning.

Bob rose and snatched the hat from Zeb and gazed at it dismally. He had been proud of his appearance in that hat, but the slight reversal of the pile made it ridiculous.

"Call the valet and ask him to iron it!" he commanded. Zeb went to the telephone. "No, there isn't time. Ask him to bring down a hot iron and iron it here. And that reminds me!—Good Lord, I sent my evening clothes to him this morning to be pressed. Tell him to rush them down here this minute. I'll have to take them in the suit-case."

Zeb waited patiently. Time was of the essence of his conspiracy. He asked, with amiable impudence:

"Any otha little messages for that ol' valet?"

Bob gave him a glare like a whiplash and Zeb turned quickly to the telephone:

"Gimme the valet, please. . . . Is that you, Mistoo Valet? Mistoo Taxta desiahs a hat hot—I mean a hot hat i'on—don't you know—a i'on to i'on a hat—yassa, a hat i'on—also where's ouah dress clo'es you took offen us this mawnin'? We gotta have them clo'es this minute. What's that? Wait a minute!"

He turned to Bob to say, "Valet say he got no hat i'on hot and yo' clo'es cain't be raidy for a half-houah yit."

"O Lord! O Lord!" Bob groaned. "You'll have to pack them and send them to me. I'll tell you the address at the railroad station."

"Is you goin' dig oil-wells in a dress-soot?" Zeb asked.

"Telephone the office to make out my bill and send it up right away."

Zeb struggled with this message as Bob struggled with his shirt again and tucked the tails in place. Then he wandered about, looking for his black trousers.

Zeb's eyes wandered from the telephone to the window. He wondered whether it would be safer to take a flying leap into space or to wait for Bob to express his feelings when he learned the incredible truth. He was in no hurry to explain to Bob that his search was vain. As Zeb finished his telephoning, Bob demanded:

"Where in hell are my trousers?"

"Yo' trousas? Is you lookin' to wear trousas—I mean what trousas was you lookin' to wear?"

"My black ones, of course."

"Yo' black t-trousousas?"

"Yes!! you black scoundrel!"

"They is with yo' otha black things."

"Not in the trunk?"

"In the trunk!"

Zeb hastily stepped into the living-room and closed the door. The language and the things Bob threw crashed against it. Then Bob, in a frenzy, wrenched the door open and raised his hand to strike.

If Zeb had been younger and stronger he would have been pulverized. But Bob could no more drive his fist into that face of unresisting adoration than he could have kicked a dog cringing at his feet.

His wrath flowed back into his heart and he dropped into a chair, groaning:

"You've done for me, Zeb!"

Zeb was silently thanking Heaven for saving him from the beating he had counted on as part of the cost of victory. To have won the triumph without a wound was beyond belief.

But his trust in the favor of Heaven received a terrific jolt when he heard Bob's next words:

"And I'm done with you. You'll never work for me again."

"Oh yes, I will," Zeb insisted. "You cain't turn me off! Nossa!"

"I can't, eh?" Bob laughed "I'll show you. You called yourself a valet? Do you know what I call you?"

"Nossa, and I got no cu'iosity at tall!"

"Then pack your things and get out of here. You can keep the clothes money I gave you and I'll give you a month's wages. Where's my money? Did you put that in the trunk, too?"

"Nossa! I couldn't git at it."

Zeb essayed a friendly chuckle, as a dog in disgrace wags his tail tentatively, but Bob quenched his mirth with one look. He went to the bathroom and clutched at his five thousand-dollar bills and the rest of his wealth.

Having no other clothes at hand, he put on his bathrobe and was trying to compute with a befuddled brain just how much to pay Zeb, when there was a sharp knock at the hall door to the living-room and Joe Yarmy rushed in. He was not followed by Kate.

Bob left the money in the bathroom and went out to meet him. Zeb drew near to listen and intervene again. He regretted that he had packed the pistol. He had rather overdone the good work.

## CHAPTER VI

KATE and Joe were creatures of impulse, and impulses are expensive, especially when one persists in acting on them.

The amount of toil and thought tney nad given to the effort to get dishonest money would have totaled them vastly more if they had put their brains into the harness of decent toil—not counting one or two long periods of incarceration when they earned nothing at all.

They captured a good deal of money now and then by various forms of trickery as old as mankind and as novel as to-morrow's police-court news. But even when the police did not get it back, the spending of it was precarious. As Dirk Memling used to say, "Any fool can steal things; it takes a genius to cash in on them." Fences were all thieves, and the pawnbrokers could never be trusted either to lend a fair amount or to keep their transactions from the police.

Joe and Kate had worked various dodges for money, and Joe had used the khaki uniform in most of the many ways in which the uniform is always abused after a war.

They had drifted into the Hotel Commodore to bask in luxury and get off the street after one successful coup on the day when Bob came early to meet April. They had happened to hear Bob bragging to the Major that he had come into a legacy. Ever on the alert for opportunity, they had exchanged glances and decided to make a try at him. While Bob was quenching his thirst, Joe and Kate had hastily agreed to work off on him the story of the old-home property in Texas. They had used variants of it in sundry other swindles, and the mania for Texas oil had given it special timeliness.

Kate had persuaded Joe to let her pretend to be his sister, and to be patient while she played upon Bob's noble impulse to help out a fellow-soldier and his native impulse to dally

with a pretty girl. She had grown very fond of her victim, though she had not weakened in her intention to take advantage of him. It required no great sagacity on her part to realize that the more virtuous she pretended to be the more Bob would admire her.

Bob had driven them so frantic by his delays and hesitations, that Joe would cheerfully have sandbagged him if he had ever caught him with the money on his person.

But the first chance Joe ever had to lay hands on the cash was in April's studio, and he dared not grab it and run, since Bob was big and strong and the chances for a getaway were slim. A good thief, like a good general, never joins battle without making sure of his road to retreat.

Joe had recourse then to the pocket-piece he always carried—a counterfeit half-dollar, made with both sides alike, for use on occasions when the toss of a coin is accepted as the arbiter of a dispute.

Luck had fooled Joe again and the half-dollar had rolled. By the time he had recovered it the five thousand had gone. He still lacked even a theory as to the method of its evanishment.

Then he had encountered McCann in the street and had been ordered out of town. Joe and Kate were familiar to many of the detectives of many of our cities, and each city had been satisfied to pass them along as a problem to the next. This form of serial exile was very annoying to Joe and Kate, but the penalties of disobeying the order to move on were sharp and severe, never more so than at that moment, when all the world was suffering from a riot of crime.

In New York, as in other cities, robberies were carried on more in the spirit of the old highway than the modern town. Bank-messengers were held up every day; pepper was thrown in their eyes, and pistol battles broke out in the most sedate neighborhoods. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were carried off by juvenile carriers hitherto considered trustworthy for as huge a bundle of securities as they could lift. Gangs drove up to banks, cigar-stores, laundries, box-offices, dance-halls, railway and subway ticket-offices, everywhere where they scented money, and raided them with presented revolvers, then leaped into motor-cars and dashed through the crowded streets, often with mobs of automobiles in pursuit.

The glorious days of Jesse James and his fellow-heroes were brought back multiplied with all the modern improvements. The police and detective forces were treated to barrages of such scathing press notices as few but playwrights ordinarily enjoy.

In consequence it was almost impossible for a professional thief to go about the most innocent unprofessional errands without impolite comments from the hated authorities.

This was a cruel anticlimax to the dreams Kate and Joe had cherished for the spending of Bob's ten thousand dollars. It wrung their poor souls to give up, without a cent to show for all their expensive campaign. It offended their artistic conscience, too.

As a last desperate resort they had fallen back on a hasty improvisation of the badger game, which is doubtless as ancient as Assyria, and will doubtless be interrupted when the trumpet of Judgment Day is sounded.

The Mann Act, indeed, had brought the game a brilliant revival. That virtuous edict, like all other efforts to legislate vice out of existence, had given the criminals something new to play with. It was meant, of course, to prevent wicked old men from taking innocent young girls on vicious excursions. Since the Federal laws can always operate where a state-line occurs, it was decreed that any man who should go from one state to another with a woman for immoral purposes became liable to arrest and punishment by the Federal powers. This was nuts for the blackmailers, for it is simply necessary for a wicked young woman to lure an innocent old man into another state, then a confederate breaks in upon them, pretends to be a Federal officer, and arrests them both. The woman pleads frantically, the old man is scared to death, and the pseudo-detective finally consents to drop the case when he has shaken down the old man for as much blackmail as the traffic will bear. Sometimes these strolling players extort fortunes from rich men who prefer financial to social bankruptcy.

It is not pretty, but it is art. Kate and Joe had done it once or twice, but had been unlucky in striking victims of meager wealth. They could not invoke the Mann Act against Bob, but the badger trick had worked to perfection up to its climax, and then the impulsive Bob had unwittingly

invented a new checkmate and by his quixotic chivalry had thwarted the blackmailers.

This unforeseen and undeserved return of good for evil had quite maddened Kate. She had "tried everything once" but matrimony, and she frightened Joe by her maniac determination to fool with that experiment also.

It has always been one of the hazards of the criminal profession that decent instincts are apt to intervene unexpectedly and spoil the most competent schemes.

Joe wanted to give Kate the beating she merited, but he had learned to be afraid of her when one of her wild whims possessed her. He knew that she would kill him or, worse yet, peach on him, if he resisted her. He knew something of the sensations of the Kaiser, seeing one after another of his irresistible offensives crumpled up by some unforeseen obstacle just as he came within reach of Paris.

The Kaiser was chopping trees at Amerongen now, and Joe was afraid that he would soon be cracking rock at Ossining if he thwarted Kate.

He had little money left when he bought the transportation at the Pennsylvania Station. In fact, he had only funds enough to carry the three to Chicago, with a drawing-room for the bridal couple and a lower berth for "brother" Joe.

Texas, in any case, was out of the question. Joe and Kate had originally come from there—at the advice of the legal authorities. They had been in the oil-fields once or twice, but had been sped thence by the Texas Rangers, and had brought away nothing but a little of the lingo. They had no desire to go back, for the Rangers are rude persons.

What Joe and Kate would do when they got to Chicago they left to fate to decide in Chicago. Joe hoped that Kate would tire of matrimony, as she had tired of everything else, and be ready to listen to reason, tap the bridegroom on the head with a lead pipe, and make off with the five thousand as alimony. A little crime like that would never be noticed in Chicago.

If Joe had had the wisdom to carry any of his schemes out to their logical resolution, he would have gone into some business with a more certain future than crookery.

The thoughts of youth may be long, long thoughts, but the thoughts of criminals are short, short. The folly of Joe

and Kate was less in the conduct of their negotiations than in the grand initial idiocy of undertaking them at all.

When Joe had performed his chores he went to the subway station to wait for Kate and Bob. He had a long and uneasy vigil, and then Kate came along alone. She was in great agitation when she arrived.

"Where's your little sparring-partner?" Joe had asked.

"He's coming along as soon as he gets his clothes on. Seen McCann?"

"No. I think I lose him. But I don't want to be too sure. What kep' you so long?"

Kate told him of the bunch of women she had found in Bob's rooms, and of the battle she had fought for his possession, and of her proud victory, with the unexpected extra-purse of the necklace.

Joe's eyes were diamonds as he murmured:

"Real shiners? Lea' me lamp 'em once."

"Not here!" said Kate, "with everybody in town hangin' raound. Take my word for it, they are worth a million dollas, mo' or less."

"Well, let's beat it and call it a day's work."

"What, and lose ma bran'-new husband?"

"Ah, hell, what you want of a husband? What you goin' to do with him when you get him?"

Kate's canny features grew saintly as she murmured, "Love will find the way."

Many a more honorable woman has let love so bemuse her that she has risked all rather than be content with much.

Let him that is of unerring aim, as the parable says literally, cast the first stone at Kate.

Her rapture began to dwindle, though, as the minutes slipped away without bringing her the sight of the new lord of her life. She and Joe paced the murky subway platform, letting train after train go by, and feeling that each one carried off their last chance of escape. The ticket-chopper stared at them, but assumed that they were using his cavern for a rendezvous, as so many did. New York couples have scant play for romance. A policeman, going home from work, gave them a scare as he studied them idly.

They kept referring to the clock, and taking new alarms from its relentless grinding away of their sparse leisure.

"He's chucked you. He ain't nevva comin'," Joe mocked, but Kate's face was so piteous that he forbore to torment her. He was tempted to wrest the necklace from her and dart aboard a train with it, but again his artistic conscience weakly yielded to a cheap Philistine tenderness.

Kate felt like the woman in the old picture of the Rock of Ages, clinging to the cross while the waves crash at her feet. She felt that if she let go of Bob's strong support the waves would drag her down forever into a life that she found as unsatisfactory as good people find virtue.

But her grip on hope could not last forever. She could not turn the station clock back or tamper with the hours. She grew sick with terror and dismay. She did not so much blame Bob for treachery as dread his awakening to the truth about her. At last Joe said:

"You've either got to go get him or give him up. They's no two ways about it. Let's go hunt for the—"

"If we go, he may come here and not find us. Then he'll think we've chucked him. He'll think I stole his motha's necklace, and he'll hate me forevva," Kate wailed.

"Maybe he got the wrong station in mind, and is waitin' down the line somewhere."

"But if we leave here, he may turn up."

There are few customs that have caused more excruciating mental torment than the habit of arranging to meet somebody somewhere. Railway stations probably house more mental agony than asylums.

Kate dared neither to go nor to stay; to wait longer was impossible; not to wait longer was intolerable.

At length Joe said: "You go afta him, and I'll wait here. Then one of us is bound to nab him."

"No; he might come, and before I could get back it would be too late to get to the City Hall."

"Then lea' me go afta him, and you wait here. If he comes, you beat it for the license and I'll go wait for you at the church."

This seemed to be an inspiration. Kate agreed to it and Joe hurried away, his heart full of gentle contempt for Kate and of hot wrath at Bob for sweating them through a third degree of suspense.

Kate was sorely tempted to take a peek at the necklace,

but the station platform was never without its crowd of people getting off trains or waiting to get on them. The box felt light, but the wrapping-paper was heavy enough to give it a little heft, and it had been reinforced inside to keep the lawn ties straight.

She solaced herself by toying with the wedding-ring. She had been surprised at the cheapness of it. The most expensive plain gold band she could buy cost only ten dollars. She felt that she had never made so wonderful an investment.

Getting married is one of the greatest bargains there are. It is staying married, or getting unmarried, that costs.

## CHAPTER VII

WHEN Joe reached Bob's hotel and went to his room, without waiting to be announced, he was sure that Bob had gone or that he would find him just going.

When he saw him in his bathrobe, with bare knees visible as he came forward, his pent-up impatience broke out in a flood:

"Well, I'll be double damned. Ain't you even dressed yet? And me and Kate drillin' up and down that Gawdam subway till me feet ache! What the—"

"I'm mighty sorry—" Bob began.

"Sorry! You're sorry! What the— Well, I'll be—if this don't beat— Je—"

"It was absolutely impossible for me to get away. I couldn't go to the church or the City Hall like this, could I?"

"Who said you could? You got clo'es, 'ain't you? You've took time enough to dress a whole army. Whyn't you put on your pants?"

"Because they're not here!"

"They 'ain't been stole off you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've heard of everything else, but this beats— 'Ain't you got a nurse or somebody to take care of you?"

"That's enough, Mr. Yarmy. I'm in no mood to take anything from you. I've had more than I can stand already."

"More 'n you can stand? How about Kate? How much is she supposed to stand, huh?"

"I can't tell you how sorry I am."

"You needn't try to tell me nothin'. What you gonna do? That's the question. What you gonna do? Go to bed or git married first?"

"I can't do anything till I get my clothes. If you'll wait for a later train, I'll send out and buy some."

"Later nothin'! We gotta get that train. That's the

abso-damn-lutely last train we can get. I got the tickets, too—paid for 'em myself, drawin'-room an' evvathing."

"I'll gladly reimburse you."

"Reimburse me! It's Kate I'm thinkin' of. She's got her fool heart set on marryin' you, damn you. I wanted her to take the money in the first place, but she wouldn't, and now I'm sick to think I didn't. You're no good, anyway. You and she got about as much chance of bein' happy married as a—I don't know what."

This theory was well established in Bob's heart. He was amazed to find that a suspicion of it had occurred to Joe. They were two men—two business men, with no women present. He hated to be ungallant to Kate, but he thought of April's eyes as she bade him an eternal farewell; he thought of her mother's reproachful woe; he thought of his own mother's broken-hearted stare. It was a case of three hearts against one. Why should he break the hearts that had long been his lest he put a slight crackle in the surface of a stranger's heart?

Mad hopes and projects ran pell-mell through his mind, and he spoke:

"Mr. Yarmy, this is a very delicate matter. I'm a beast anyway you fix it, but—the money you speak of—suppose I gave you what I have—the five thousand I first spoke of—would it—would it insult your sister if I offered her that instead of my hand? Be perfectly frank about it, won't you?"

Joe's face lighted up as if some one had turned an electric switch inside his head. His eyes were incandescent bulbs. Kate was too far away to protest. At this distance, her infatuation looked doubly insane. Common sense was coming back to its own. He spoke cautiously, hardly daring to believe that the Jinx that had ruined all his schemes had fallen asleep for a moment.

"I don't quite get you. Are you offerin' me five thousand dolla's to release you from yo' promise of ma'iage to—to ma sista?"

Bob mistook his earnestness for repugnance. He hastened to say:

"Oh, I didn't mean to be offensive. I'm willing to carry out my promise, but I was just thinking—"

"So am I. I ask you again, is this yo' proposition: You

THE INFATUATE ZEB LUNGED FOR IT

slip—you pay me five thousand dolla's and all bets—the wedding is off?"

"That was what I was thinking of, but, of course, if you—"

"Well, I'll accept. My sista isn't here, but you pass me the cash and I'll undatake to square it with her."

Bob fairly groaned with relief. He felt like old Atlas when, for a moment, Hercules lifted the world off his shoulders and let him straighten up again—for a moment.

Bob whirled and strode into the other room to get the money and buy his freedom. That was cheap at any price.

Zeb had heard the parley. He had rejoiced at the hint of his master's release from the shameful bondage to the Yarmys. He had been the agent of high Heaven in the transaction. All his audacities were divinely justified. He was ready for more, and a trifle overbearing and dictatorial, as prophets usually are.

He intercepted Bob and demanded, with devout impudence:

"Hol' on, Masta Bob. You ain't gwine to pass ova none of that money to that Yahmy trash?"

"I certainly am, and I advise you not to interfere again."

He brushed Zeb aside, went into the bathroom, picked up the five magnificent slips of paper, and turned back. Zeb wished he had known they were there. He blocked Bob's way again with appealing gestures, whimpering:

"Don't you do it, Masta Bob. You listen to me! I jes' cain't allow you!"

Bob walked past him without deigning to answer. Zeb caught at his bathrobe. Bob snatched it free. Zeb followed on his heels, even into the room where Joe Yarmy waited, trying to subdue the bubbles of joy that were streaming from the champagne-cup of his heart.

And then, as Bob held out the roll of money in his palms, the infatuate Zeb lunged for it, clutched it, leaped backward, swung the door to, turned the key in the lock, rammed the money in his pocket, hobbled to the container of his vacuum-cleaner, caught it up like a fat baby, hobbled to the rear door, took the key from the lock, darted into the hall, locked the door, and slipped, sprawled, and hopped down the steep stairway, round and round and round till he came out in an area.

## CHAPTER VIII

ZEB was amazed to find himself alive on level ground again, with no bones broken. He was in an ecstasy of fear and of inspiration. He moderated his pace to a walk and made his way to the street. Not a taxicab was in sight —only an obsolete old hack with a living skeleton dozing in the shafts, and a driver on the box dreaming of the ancient days when people rode in horse-drawn vehicles.

Zeb opened the door of the cab, slammed his vacuum-cleaner inside, and said to the old man, who turned to cast a startled glance at the disturber of his repose:

"Hey, man! You gotta git me to Bronnix Pahk the quickest you kin. I got a rush job up yonda, and I got money what says Scoot!"

The horse had turned round to stare in amazement, and he plunged forward as Zeb clambered and sprawled inside and closed the door after him just before a lamp-post brushed it off.

Bob and Joe had been statufied with amazement at Zeb's unparalleled assault. Of all the daylight robberies Joe had heard of or shared in, this was the coarsest work. He simply had to pause and exclaim, "Well, I'll be—" etc., before he could move.

As he leaped for the door, he ran into Bob, still staring at his empty palm. Bob whirled, and the two men, rivals in wrath, canceled each other's struggles at the door. They were so blind with rage that neither would yield the other precedence in setting his shoulder to it.

It was a stout, sound-proof door, and it gave way slowly and rendingly.

When they pushed through its splinters they ran to the front-hall door first and down the hall. When they got back the wind had blown the door shut. It had a spring-lock.

Bob's keys were in the bathroom. The two men raged till a chambermaid came along with a pass-key. Bob's costume explained for him. She let them in. They went to the back-hall door.

This also was locked, and not with a spring-lock, as the front doors were, but with an old-fashioned contrivance. The key was on the other side. This door was still harder to smash, and when they had shattered it and looked down the well of the stairway there was no sign of the fugitive.

They rang for the freight-elevator and cursed its delay. They were palsied with chagrin at the old negro's easy success. When the elevator finally arrived and the door slid back the elevator-man disclaimed all knowledge of Zeb. He had not ridden in that car.

"Come on!" said Joe. "We'll get him before he's gone fah. We'll set the cops after the old—"

Bob looked down at his Scottish knees. So did the elevator-man. Bob had on even more than the costume that young men wore about the New York streets when they practised for the annual Marathons, but he shook his head.

"Count me out," he muttered.

He stood amid the flinders of his back door in abject helplessness, as when, on the last day of the war, the Germans had "shot the pants off him" and left him helpless in his wrecked airship in the hamlet of Villeperdue.

But Joe Yarmy leaped cursing into the elevator and ordered it to deliver him to the nether regions. The door slid shut and the car dropped fast, but Joe's language came smoking back as he filled it with a profanity that dazed the charioteer.

## CHAPTER IX

EVERYBODY is always making fun or shame of the hypocrisies and lapses of the virtuous. But the wicked are just as inconsistent and fall just as ludicrously short of perfection.

Here was Joe Yarmy, a thief by trade and an avowed enemy of the police, for whom he furnished as much employment as he could—here was Joe Yarmy, standing on the sidewalk and cursing the fact that there was not a policeman in sight to stop the thief who had stolen the goods he had meant to steal himself.

It was the second time in one day that a sum of five thousand dollars had escaped Joe's needful clutch, and to be "bit twice in the same place" was considered the depth of ignominy by Joe and his sort.

On the first occasion he had not been able even to imagine a clue to the thief. On the second he saw the black hand of old Zeb snatch the money and slam the door.

Joe had searched that very darky that very morning for the other five thousand, and had neither found it nor expected to. Now he decided that the incredible coon had captured the swag on both occasions.

He had a native, a geographical, willingness to abuse a negro on general principles. He had lent a hand at a lynching or two without troubling to make sure that the victim was guilty or that his offense was heinous. He wanted to do all those things that are done to negroes—tortures that have hardly been equaled—except, of course, in the agonies visited by Indian savages upon pioneers, and by earnest Christians upon other Christians who differed slightly in doctrine.

It would have fared ill with Zeb if Joe had found him. It would have fared ill with Joe if he had found the policeman he was looking for. The only thing that saved Joe was his

uncertainty. If his frantic soul could have had its way, he would have done as Stephen Leacock's hero did, and "galloped off madly in all directions."

He stood swaying in the middle of the block. At either end of it was a four-corners leading north, south, east, and west, not to mention the old bias of Broadway playing havoc with the compass.

The fugitive might have chosen any of those routes, and pursuit along the wrong one would only increase the interval.

As Joe rocked and puffed out curses, various other considerations began to bubble up in his mind.

He had been warned to get out of New York on the evening train. He remembered with a sardonic grin a banner he had seen strung across the street of an Oklahoma town unfriendly to Africans:

"Nigger, don't let the sun go down."

And now New York had swung the same banner on him. The police had murmured:

"Yarmy, don't let the sun go down."

If he went to the police to set them on Zeb's track, they would lock him up. Or if he found a lieutenant on the desk so ignorant as to be unfamiliar with his face and fame, the yap would ask about the money, and how it came to be stolen, and whose it was. To tell a string of lies to a cop was risky, and to explain that Bob Taxter was paying it to Joe to stall off Kate's wedding would put the lieutenant wise. Next to a reporter, the desk-man of a police station has the most cynical eye in the world and is the hardest audience to convince of innocence.

Joe realized that the protection and industry of the police were not for him to invoke. And they called this a free country!

He jerked a cigar from his pocket and sank a canine tooth into it with a viciousness that did him a little good. He could not find a match in his pockets, so he took a "dry smoke" and considered. Like the piper's cow, he "considered very well."

There was no use in going back to Bob Taxter. That boob was cleaned dry.

All this while Kate was waiting for him. Joe set out automatically to find her and divide the abominable news

with her. He had nothing else to split. Joe was always strong for fifty-fifty on his bad luck.

His gait slackened. Kate had chucked him once; had been mushy enough to want to marry this Taxter and let her old side-partner slide.

She was through with him. Well, then, he was through with her.

The problem of funds came up. He remembered his expenditure for the transportation to Chicago—three tickets, a drawing-room and a lower berth for the honeymoon that turned to cheese.

He boarded a street-car and went to the Pennsylvania Station. At the redemption window he hesitated, then decided to keep his own ticket and take the train alone.

The ticket-office accepted his two tickets and paid him back a total of $71.80. But he was told that the drawing-room would have to be redeemed in Chicago. In the line of waiting men, however, he found one only too eager to buy it from him at the tariff of $18 plus the tax of $1.44.

As Joe gathered in all the money, he thought of Kate again. She would have to shift for herself. Well, she had quit first, and he was tired of her, anyway. A good-looking woman could always cash in on her looks in the open market or on the curb. This was an enormous advantage over a man, who could find no place to pawn his securities.

Suddenly Joe recalled Kate's talk of the necklace. If he had seen it he would have thought of it before. But it was only a rumor. Now it made a ghostly radiance in his dark skull. It lit up Kate handsomely. The wench was worth cultivating, after all. He hadn't ought to ditch her too sudden. Them skirts can't be treated like men can.

It is almost impossible for the normal mind not to feel amiable toward people who have money. Money is the great pacifier. Even the church accepts it as a penance for the sins of the living and the dead.

Joe hurried to the subway and took a train to the station where he had left Kate.

She was not there.

## CHAPTER X

INNOCENCE hath her repentance no less confounded than sin.

Bob Taxter's good, clean heart was as full of black wrath as Joe Yarmy's crooked soul. And he would have dealt with Zeb as harshly if he could have overtaken him.

But he could not even pursue. He was trouserless. He could not run through the streets, because he had nothing on his legs except a pair of those dimity trunks that now replace the voluminous Trojan drawers of our forefathers.

Bob's first thought was of the police. When Joe Yarmy shot down the freight-elevator Bob went back to his own apartment to telephone the alarm.

By the time he had picked his way through the ragged edges of two doors (which he would be compelled to pay for —and, worse yet, explain) he realized that he would have to tell the police all about it—all about his marital complication, all about his effort to buy off the bride, all about the old negro, and all about his first five thousand—and his first fiancée.

This would be an unpleasant burden to unload over the telephone, and a less pleasant to pour out before the detective who would doubtless be sent up for further particulars.

Bob hung the receiver back on the hook almost before he took it off.

He also, like Joe, took comfort in gnawing a guiltless cigar to shreds and declaring war on the African race.

He sank into a chair, stretched out his bare legs, and cursed dismally.

He wondered why Joe did not come back. He was doubtless following Zeb.

Bob wondered when Kate would turn up. He would have to talk to her through the door. He could not let her in. His costume would be an anachronism before the ceremony.

To shout his story through a door-panel to a baffled bride would be no more congenial than stammering it over the wire into the ears of an alkaline policeman.

He wished that he could find some way to get out of the house before Kate came back. If only he had a pair of trousers! He remembered hazily a once-famous advertising lyric:

> When the pant-hunter pantless is panting for pants,
> He pants for the best pants the pant-market grants,
> And panteth unpanted until he implants
> Himself in a pair of our Plymouth Rock Pants.

At that time the word "pants" was considered an atrocious vulgarity of peculiar plebeiance. No gentleman wore them or referred to them. Recently the word had come into playful popularity. Fashionable ladies not only spoke gaily of them, but wore them. Words and things and habits, like families, rise up from lowly origins, flourish awhile, and sink back into poverty or to a lavender oblivion. Poets would one day be using "pants" for its exquisite archaic charm.

Bob's wardrobe consisted of the brown shoes and brown socks he had on; the underwear, ditto; a fuzzy silk hat, a straw hat, a bathrobe, and a few other trifles.

The rest of the things were in a trunk, by now at the Pennsylvania Station (he assumed). He might telephone and have it sent back to the hotel. He looked for the claim-check. It was gone! Zeb, the vacuum-cleaner, had made a clean sweep.

As Bob ran about the room he stumbled over the vacuum-cleaner hose, which Zeb had been unable to carry off. It symbolized the serpent Bob had warmed in his bosom. He felt almost small enough to crawl into the nozle. He jounced back in his chair. He was imprisoned by his undress and ashamed to call for help.

He thought of his mother. Again an old song taunted him: "There was I, waiting at the church." Everything got into a mocking song nowadays.

He was sorry for his mother, yet she would be glad that his wedding had not come off—or had come off. Or had it? At any moment Kate might arrive with the news that she

was going through with the wedding and would wait for a later train, or to-morrow.

He thought of April, and his pride sweat blood. What a cad he had had to be in her eyes!—a bad actor making a bad rôle worse. He could never dare go near her again. Never had she been so beautiful. She had fought for him and stuck by him as long as she could. A regular gimper—that was what she was!

The telephone rang. Bob's heart shivered with it. That was his bride, no doubt, come to claim him. She still had a mortgage on his life, since Zeb had run off with the ransom money.

He let the telephone buzz as long as he dared. Then he rose and answered it. He heard his mother's voice.

"Is Mista Taxta theah? Bob honey, is that you? Oh, Heaven be blest! I was afraid something te'ble had happened to you. Are you all right, honey? But tell me. I've been heah at the Little Chu'ch, waiting and waiting, but you didn't come. Did I get the wrong chu'ch, or what?"

"No, mother, I—I—er—there's been a hitch, and—and—well, my plans are uncertain just now."

He could hear the thrill of hope in her voice: "You don't mean it's all off? Oh, that's too good to be true."

"I'm afraid so. I—I can't tell you just now, but—"

"Are you leaving town on that train?"

"No; not on that train, but—well—I—you—you go on back to Aunt Sally's, and I'll telephone you there as soon as I decide."

"But can't I see you? I'll come right ova."

"No—no, indeed—you can't. You go on up to Aunt Sally's, and I'll let you know. Good-by, honey love!"

She had to accept that. It was only half-hope; but it was better than whole despair, though not nearly so restful.

Some one knocked at the door. He was afraid to answer. He sat motionless till the knocking ceased and somebody's footsteps padded away into silence. By and by there was another sharp knock. He sat still. A key was put in the door. Bob had a horrified expectation of seeing a hotel chambermaid—one of those daring explorers that Bill Nye wrote of, who come into a hotel room and change the sheets while the guest gasps.

In came a valet, who had got the pass-key from a chambermaid. He came in to hang up Bob's dinner-jacket and trousers, which he had pressed.

He was startled to see Bob sitting glum in decided négligé. Bob felt called upon to answer the questions implied in this man's glance: "Somebody stole my clothes."

"Indeed!" said the valet. "They're stealing everything nowadays, aren't they? Did you have them on when they stole them, sir?"

"No," said Bob.

"They'd have taken them just the same, sir," said the valet. "Sometimes I wonder whatever the world's getting at, with all this crime."

Then, noting Bob's remaining money on the bureau, he made the suggestive remark:

"It's lucky they didn't get your money, sir."

Bob took the hint and gave him a silver quarter. Then he asked if the valet had any black shoes to sell. The valet shook a regretful head. But he had shirt-buttons, collars, ties, and black-silk socks.

Bob ordered what he needed and the valet went to fetch the things.

While Bob waited a bell-boy came up with the bill that Bob had asked for. The boy accepted a quarter and left the bill.

Bob regarded it with dismay. If he paid it he would not have money enough to get to Texas. But his trunk had gone, and he would be expected to pay. If only the proprietor had refused to let the trunk go until the shot was settled!

The valet came down with his wares. They reduced Bob's assets by ten dollars. He finished his toilet, and made a very presentable guest for an informal dinner, if one did not look down at the yellow shoes. But he could not go to Texas in evening clothes. He could not go without paying his bill, and then he could not go at all.

In his lost trunk there was a complete equipment of costumes, but no money. His program was compulsory; he must get back his trunk, find Zeb, and get back his money, or borrow a lot from somebody before he could go to Texas, or even stay put in New York.

A pretty situation for one who but yesterday was a ten-thousandaire with a million in prospect. This Napoleon of finance could not even get out of Corsica.

He decided to keep what funds he had as long as possible. He was blushing like mad when he appeared in the lobby of the hotel in his premature evening clothes and explained to the clerk that he would not give up his room just yet, but would go and reclaim his trunk and get his day clothes out. He would, therefore, let his bill run on to the end of the week.

The sophisticated clerk realized from Bob's blushing confusion that he was not trying to beat the hotel and was polite, if not altogether respectful.

Bob writhed at having to accept the man's condescending generosity and rushed out—not "out into the night," where desperate heroes and heroines go; but out in the more terrible day. He wanted to be absent when Kate came back, and he wanted to buy some black shoes before the shops closed.

He slunk along the street with guilty speed. Policemen in plenty passed him now and recognized his sneaking carriage, but imputed it properly to the shame of his rathe evening clothes. They grinned. Everybody grinned, and turned to grin some more.

Bob gave a perfect proof that the sense of shame has less to do with nakedness than with a sense of inappropriateness. Bob was fully clothed, but there was a kind of indecency about the glare of the late sunlight on his excessive expanse of white shirt. The brown shoes with the dinner-jacket were positively immoral.

He found a boot-shop and bought a pair of high, black patent-leather shoes to hide the brown socks coquetting below his black-broadcloth trouser-heins. He would have felt rather fashionable if it had been an hour later. Then people would have glanced at him with respect as a swell, instead of an object of ridicule. Decency is a matter not only of custom but of chronometer as well.

Bob went to the Pennsylvania Station and asked at the baggage-office for his trunk. He had no claim-check, but an explanation—fiction founded on fact—secured him the privilege of search on his promise to furnish identification.

He explored the ultimate recesses of the baggage world, where mountains of trunks made cubist landscapes, and

where little one-man automobiles shot here and there, carrying luggage.

No trace of his trunk being found, a search of the records was made, and the baffling fact disclosed that no baggage had been delivered from Bob's hotel that day. He telephoned to the porter there and learned that his trunk had been rushed to the Grand Central—at Zeb's specific directions.

Bob added one more item to his bill of damages against Zeb. He was too weary to attempt to go to another station and search another throng of trunks.

He had nothing before him but an empty evening, followed by an eternity of remorse. Since he had so much remorse on hand already, he decided that a little more would not be noticeable.

He felt an enormous desire to be gone for a space from the cares that attend the well-behaved young man. He felt a craving for a period of thoughtlessness and recklessness. He yearned for a journey to some Happy Hunting Ground where one could play ninepins with the stupid rules of life.

In short, he wanted to get drunk. He wanted to get drunk publicly and wildly and dramatically before a lot of people, so that the whole world might see him slap the whole world in the face as a protest against its intolerable stupidity and malignity

This is as mysterious an ambition as it is familiar—and terrific. Every people of every age and clime has had it and found some alcoholic brew to satisfy it. The insects and the animals are not innocent of the intoxicating effects of intoxication.

Among mankind, it is a favorite theme of the poets and the police.

Bob was not likely to inspire the former, but the latter might expect a busy night.

It is painful to describe the follies and the vices of our fellow-citizens. The theme is supposed to be a very noble one when it is handled in the pulpit, but when preachers find it handled in novels they are sure to protest. Perhaps the element of professional jealousy is not absolutely absent, but it is curious that what is decent in church should be indecent outside, isn't it?—or is it?

Nice novelists write of nice people doing nice things

nicely in spite of all the machinations of a few machine-made fiends in more or less human guise. Naughty novelists, like wicked reporters, describe what they find, and feel it dishonest to twist the facts for any purpose soever.

There are many good souls who suffer from reading anywhere in print what they see and hear all about them. They feel that if nobody wrote about bad people or the bad deeds of goodish people, young people would not be tempted to do wrong. As if in countries where there is no fiction even in the newspaper form there were no vice! As if the animals, who surely do not read or go to plays or moving-picture shows, did not misbehave at all! And surely no historian pretends that the alphabet was invented before adultery, arson, assassination, and the other crimes.

It is all very baffling.

A third multitude of readers is patient with the wickedness of the wicked, but is revolted when the hero or heroine of a novel does anything unwise or wicked. They have no patience with a book-person who makes foolish investments —though the annual waste of the United States alone in this field totals billions of dollars; though the readers themselves may waste space in their safe-deposit boxes with shares whose market value is nothing, net, paying various rates of interest on the same amount. They will call Bob a jackass for wanting to put money into oil speculation, though it has been estimated that in spite of the enormous amount of wealth made in the fields during the boom, more money was put in than was taken out.

Other readers will never forgive Bob for wanting to get drunk, and getting it. Neither will Bob. The worst and the best of it was that he found it almost impossible to be bad entertainingly.

Of course, the sordid and odious old wallows of swinish carnality were available to the young man about New York, as to any man in any community, American or foreign, large or small, ancient or modern. Persons on the alert for brief partnerships of this sort were active just outside Eden, and in Abraham's time, among Moses's followers, among the Crusaders in Palestine, in Puritan New England, and apparently in every place where a crowd of people of any sort is assembled.

But Bob was in no mood for such dismal lubricity. He wanted hilarity, brilliance, excitement, light, laughter, and revelry.

And these things, curiously enough, New York seemed unable to afford him after midnight. The reckless gaieties of the new Babel were simply not to be found as advertised. He found other sensations, which—but poor Kate must not be left all night on that subway platform.

## CHAPTER XI

KATE YARMY was not the most patient woman in the world; and if she had been, she would have gone frantic in the gloom of that subway cell. Even Job was not put to the test of waiting in a subway station for somebody.

Kate had two people to wait for, and she paced the platform with the gnawing rancor of a tigress in Bronx Park.

She would sit down awhile, then rise again and trudge back and forth till she was fagged out; then sit down and watch the stairways till she had to rise or scream.

Now and then she would climb the steps and pace the sidewalk in the upper air. She bought papers, magazines, chewing-gum, and chocolates. She went back to her dungeon and walked the harrowing post anew.

The clock was her sneering enemy. She saw it shoving its baleful hand toward the hour of the closing of the license bureau. She saw it slide past, moving invisibly, yet indubitably and irrevocably.

She could not fool herself longer. She could not marry Bob to-day. And to-morrow must not find her in New York!

She took the wedding-ring from her handbag and gave it her sincerest maledictions. It was so small that she could not punish it. She could not slap it in the face. She wanted to hurl it under the eternal next train that was always roaring in and always sliding away into the endless basement of the tunnel.

She had marveled at the ring's cheapness. But it had proved to be an imbecile extravagance; it was one hundred per cent. loss.

Her only solace was the possession of the necklace. Her only pride was the fact that she had had sand enough to demand it and get away with it. The hankering to see it, to feast her eyes on it, to bathe her fingers in it—what she would have called the "yen" for it—grew unendurable.

She walked at last to the dead-wall at the end of the platform and untied the string with tremulous fingers, unwrapped the parcel with a painful effort at indifference, and lifted the lid of the necktie-box for a peep at the shining liquescence of the faceted gems.

She gazed on air. Her eyes drank deep of the emptiness that filled the box.

She swayed for a fall, steadied herself, and gulped her bitter medicine. For a wild moment she believed in an occult happening. The mystic fiend that had carried off Bob Taxter's five thousand in the morning was still on her trail!

This flattering unction did not soothe that soul of hers. None knew better than she that this is a world of trickery and theft and lies. She had been buncoed, flimflammed, double-crossed—all the disgusting things for which so many synonyms are required in all languages.

She blenched with the sincerest shame and the profoundest humiliation she had ever known. Then she muttered phrases that would have startled Queen Elizabeth and left Catherine the Great in envy.

She cursed herself and everybody. She anathematized the entire human race.

She felt an intense need to kill somebody right away. She dashed up the subway stairs and hurried as fast as she dared to Bob Taxter's hotel. The hall-boys made way for her. The elevator-boy smelled brimstone as he hoisted her to the floor she called.

She pounded on Bob's door, and she had her talons cramped to rend him, her words boiling to scald him.

But he did not answer. He had gone out. The elevator-boy confirmed the bitter disappointment of her surmise. He had gone out! but where? There were so many places to go in New York! It was like hunting somebody who was along the Milky Way somewhere.

Womanly intuition made a brilliant guess. He had gone back to that Summerlin woman. Well, she should not have him! Kate made an almost audible ululation of protest against such an atrocity. She would commit a greater one, if necessary, to prevent it.

She left Bob's hotel and made her way to April's apart-

ment-house. She had gnawed her lips raw with rage, but she spoke with exquisite sweetness when she asked the hall-boy if Miss Summerlin were at home. The boy said:

"Yassum, but she sent down wud she ain't to be distubbed by nobody. She's right sick."

"That's good—too bad," Kate mumbled. "Did you see Mr. Taxta?"

"Oh, yassum."

"Is he here?"

"Oh, no'm. He ain't been yere sence this mawnin'. His motha 'phomed ova to ast the same question a little while ago, but nobody up-stairs knows where he's at."

"I see," said Kate. "All right."

And she went out slowly. Her intuition had guessed brilliantly, but wrong. And her intuition had never another guess to offer.

Kate was alone in New York; alone in the world. Even Joe had vanished. She was unable to imagine what could have happened to him. A taxicab might have run over him. He might have been delayed and gone to the subway. He might be waiting there with the railroad tickets. She hurried to the subway. Joe was not there. She could not know that he had sought her there and, not finding her, drifted back to the Pennsylvania Station.

But he could not make up his mind to take the train. He simply could not leave New York in such chaos of mind. He was afraid to stay and unable to go. He made long détours and quick dodges to escape the eye of such policemen as he saw, and such persons as he suspected of being plain-clothes men.

By and by hunger, the old dictator, began to claim pre-eminence in his thoughts. He felt a timidity about venturing into a public restaurant, and finally bethought him of an old-time haunt, a "speak-easy," where only such visitors as were known were admitted and permitted to buy such food and liquor as the landlord ventured to sell without the formality of a license.

It was nothing more than a dingy, mean boarding-house, with a dirty dining-room in the basement. The boarders seemed to find a congeniality in the very lowness of the ceiling and the immundicity of the linen, the cutlery, the waiter,

the food. They were like certain plants, insects, and reptiles; the light pained them, they haunted the dark and narrow places: graybacks scuttering under logs. Professor Jacques Loeb calls it the crevice instinct, or stereotropism.

To this same speak-easy, drawn by the same infirmity of purpose, the same abject surrender of habit, Kate gravitated a while after.

Joe saw her come in and was about to spring at her with accusations. But he was inhibited by a twinge of guilt in his own behavior. He had little conscience, but he had a sense of congruity. Also he had a lively knowledge of Kate's ability to shrivel him with a few hot words whenever he pretended to be wronged.

He dropped into his chair and watched her take a seat with her back to him. It was a very well-built back, and it pleased his artistic ideals. It was an eloquent back, too, and he could read despondency and loneliness and fatigue in it. He was emotional and easily touched, as most criminals are. He felt a gush of pity in his heart and a recrudescence of old tenderness. They had pal'd together and gone through hell together. Let it be said to his credit as a lover, the last thing he thought of was the diamond necklace. Let it be said to his credit as a financier, the diamond necklace decided him. For its sake he resolved to forgive Kate and take her again into his favor.

In the mean while Kate had learned of him. The waiter, as he took her order, had diplomatically murmured:

"Which of yous two give the other 'n the flag foist, Kate?"

"Which of who two?" said Kate.

"You 'n' Joe. Looks funny, him settin' back there and you down here."

"Is that so?" said Kate. "Well, that face you wear looks funny to me, too, but I ain't makin' a song and dance abote it." The waiter shrugged his eyebrows and shuffled to the kitchen.

Kate went through the same mental processes as Joe. Her first impulse was to whirl round and ease her aching finger-nails and vent her pent-up wrath on him. She wanted to bounce one of those stone-age coffee-cups off his bean. But she was restrained by what she called her sense of yuma; it was a substitute conscience. She realized that she had

left Joe flat at the first hint of Bob's willingness to marry her. She had warned him not to expect to share in her husband's wealth. Joe's obedience grew handsome by contrast with her own conduct. Since she could not see him, her memory bestirred her imagination to an idealized portrait of him. They had gone through hell together. They had shared poverty and riches, the fat and the lean, the bacon of life.

He had not taken the train and left her, as she had suspected. He was probably sulking because she had preferred another guy to him. She had nobody else to turn to now; and no funds worth mentioning.

Her flare of adoration for Bob had died out and left a cold black wick. Bob had either lost or hidden his money twice. He had failed to keep the date with the parson. He had put a crimp in the badger game, had worked the old box-trick and held out the necklace on her. The loss of that was a death-blow to her trustful disposition. It was a smashing blow, too, to her prosperity. Joe was her old stand-by. She resolved to forgive him any past performances and take him back again, if he would take her back again.

And so the parted twain in mutual meditation came round to a common plan of reunion. Each felt some uneasiness as to the probable reaction of the other.

Joe kept eying Kate's back, and finally, in confirmation of the familiar superstition that it is possible to stare a person's head around, Kate slowly turned. She was really trying to let her rambling glance discover Joe accidentally. It played along the walls and the other guests, some of whom brightened up in vain as Kate's handsome eyes paused upon them. At length her gaze found Joe. She started. He started. She smiled tentatively. He smiled tentatively. Joe rose. She nodded. He came forward sheepishly. She greeted him archly, gave him a handclasp as familiar and cozy as an old glove. She motioned him to sit down.

The waiter, returning, saw the blissful couple and grinned. He set the two banquets on the same table, and went back to lean against the kitchen door and pick his teeth contentedly. He felt far more like a successful Cupid than he looked.

Joe and Kate recounted their separate histories up to the present armistice. Kate had hoped to be spared the tragedy of the necklace-swindle, but Joe asked about it. She

blushed as she confessed the dismal truth. Joe turned white as he recognized the bitter fact that his intermittent bride had come home to him with no dowry but her necessities.

It was perilous to remain in New York after McCann's fair warning, but it was unendurable to leave New York with no loot to show for their visit. Above all, it was intolerable that Bob Taxter should have the laugh on them after the pains they had taken to make a boob of him.

They could get money in many ways. The fashionable thing to do just then was to steal an automobile, preferably a police-department automobile, then rob somebody and get away with the proceeds. It was too late in the evening to poke a gun into a paying-teller's cage or throw red pepper in the eyes of a bank-messenger and grab his bag; and Joe had little technical mastery of the art of safe-cracking. But there were restaurants and cigar-stores and theater box-offices to invade; and a few ingenious youth had recently been sticking-up the cashiers of dance-halls with fair results. Still better sport was bursting into a room in a big hotel where parties had gathered to play craps, stuss, or poker; the gamesters had to shell out and dared not make a holler to the cops.

New York, like all the other cities, was in a Mardi Gras of theft and thuggery. In a New Jersey town a young girl had gone about at night in man's clothes and held up more than a hundred citizens before she was caught. Another footpad wrote letters to the police, warning them of the neighborhood and hour of the next visit.

The arch-crime, war, had bred countless smaller crimes, as always. A Chicago attorney stated that among Chicago's three million people more murders were committed in a year than in Great Britain's forty million: a murder a day, on the average, with "crime as highly organized as a mail-order business." In New York City the burglary-insurance companies were compelled to increase their rates or go into bankruptcy. They reported a total of ten thousand thefts in 1919, with an aggregate swag of twenty-five million dollars.

Kate and Joe were, therefore, in a fashionable mood. The important thing was to get square with Bob Taxter. The problems were how and where to find him and what to do to him. Whatever it was, it must be a plenty.

## CHAPTER XII

IF Bob had known of this menace gathering in his sky, he would have needed no other stimulant. He would have welcomed a fight. He needed a fight. He was back in one of the doldrums that he had known in France when he loafed about the hangars in wretched desuetude.

He had loved those Germans then, who darkled against the clouds and invited him up to a "tea-party," as they called it. And he had leaped aloft to welcome them with that superlative hospitality a warrior shows to an enemy who comes to call.

Bob would have preferred a go at Joe Yarmy to all the whisky in the world. It was for lack of such an outlet to the steam of youth in him that he sought a wrestle with the invisible and terrible angel of alcohol.

He longed for companionship in his foray, but his acquaintanceship in New York was meager. He telephoned to two or three places where Jimmy Dryden hung out, but he was not to be found. So Bob set out alone on the uncharted sky and the perilous steeps of bibacity.

He was all the more impatient to cut a wide swath since the shadow of Prohibition was lengthening on the dial, and all the lusty toss-pots in America were storing up what they could and lapping up what they could not store, against the fatal eve of July, 1919.

Bob was reckless enough when he was sober. Alcohol relaxed what few checks and controls he had, and turned his soul into such a blue flame as lighted brandy sets up about so tame a thing as an *omelette aux confitures*.

He felt a sincere resentment, too, against the prohibitionists. He inherited an aristocratic respect for wine, a tolerance for ebriety as a gentlemanly privilege—almost a duty. His ancestry had despised the Puritans as water-bibbers, though this was unjust to the Puritans, since the

reign of James II, the first Puritan king, was the drunkenest reign in British history, the only one in which it was habitual for even the titled ladies of the court to reel and roll and sprawl in boozy helplessness at receptions of state.

As a soldier who had liked nothing in France (except the war) so well as the cheapness and abundance of the wine, Bob felt tricked by the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment during his absence.

The soldiers made many a song of the fact that while they fought abroad the stay-at-homes voted liquor out of existence.

One of these ran thus:

> We won the war, we won the war,
> Who'll buy us a bottle of pop?
> The slackers voted the country dry
> While we went over the top.

But this was only the half of it, for when the soldiers came home they found another virtuous joke played on them.

The constitutional amendment was passed in all legality, but it was not to take effect until January 16, 1920, and that was too far off to mean much. Plans had also been agreed upon for immediate national prohibition during the hostilities. The war ended before this Volstead bill could be passed. But it was passed, anyway, ten days later, forbidding the making or selling of liquors between July 1, 1919, and the demobilization of the troops. Demobilization also was practically completed long before the law came into effect. But the prohibitionists did not mind a little thing like that. The President tried to get rid of the anachronistic ban, but Congress would not let him. The Congressmen filled the storage warehouses of Washington with liquor, but they would not vote for it. Later they found that it was illegal to store liquor in storage warehouses.

Such steam-roller methods called forth ferocious protests, and the protestants had noble arguments to justify them. Many of the sacred principles of justice, liberty, equality, and security were violated, and it was possible for the Brewers' Board of Trade to publish large advertisements reading like

the forepart of the Declaration of Independence, and containing such a lofty indictment as this:

The original war prohibition was enacted ten days after the war had ended as declared by President Wilson himself. The present act imposes its unexampled and oppressive provisions upon the American people almost a full year after the last shot was fired in the great conflict, and when the millions of men who were summoned to sustain our cause upon the high seas and upon the battlefield have returned to the pursuits of peace. Yet in its immediate effect and application it is founded upon a test of actual and existing war necessity. The annals of legislation disclose few instances of more shameful abuse of legislative power.

To describe how frequently and how flagrantly this measure violates long-established American principle and long-cherished American tradition would require much space. It is perhaps sufficient to indicate the ease with which persons accused under its provisions can be deprived of their right of trial by jury.

How summary proceedings before and punishment by judges can be substituted for the customary processes of law.

How the guilt of a person having possession of liquor of any kind is presumed, instead of his innocence. And how the burden of proof is upon him rather than upon his accuser.

How the person living in one sort of an establishment can escape search and seizure while his neighbor, living in another sort of dwelling, is subject to invasion.

How an army of federal agents at a cost of millions of dollars is created for enforcement purposes.

How onerous regulations govern the prescribing of liquor by physicians, and how the quantities that may be prescribed are arbitrarily limited.

The law describes as intoxicating liquor any beverage containing as much as half of one per cent. of alcohol by volume. This is contrary to the fact, for drinks containing seven times that amount of alcohol are known to be non-intoxicating.

The Eighteenth Amendment contains a clause deferring its operation until a year after the date of its ratification. This was agreed upon in order to allow manufacturers and dealers a reasonable time in which to liquidate their business and wind up their affairs. The Volstead Act, in continuing war prohibition at this time, clearly violates the pledge held out by the amendment. Hence, to its many other iniquities must be added a deliberate and calculated breach of faith. It is thus that prohibition is introduced to the American people.

The drinking-classes grew more and more dour as they saw their doom approaching. They naturally made great capital of the tyrannous trickery of the Drys.

And nothing is more common or more distressing than to see virtue making use of the very same slippery tactics that

it finds so reprehensible in vice. Religious crusades, reform movements, charitable drives, all employ the dodges and bullyings they deplore in crooked politicians, grafters, and corruptionists.

There has never been a religion that failed to juggle the facts or dared to tell the whole truth about itself or its rivals, its whole history or theirs, or to expose all the documents. There has never been a peace so noble and merciful that it could afford to reveal its minutes and arrive at open covenants openly.

Missionaries hoodwink the savages they long to save, and parents invariably resort to lies, subterfuge, and terrorism when they try to teach their children to be truthful, honest, and gentle.

And so the holy cause of temperance, inspired by the profoundest desire for the welfare of mankind, and aiming to exorcise from the world the foul, the frightful and innumerable demons that spawn in drink, played the game with stacked cards, bluffed it through, and raked in the chips under the muzzle of a pistol.

Hence, barkeepers were turned into martyrs, and the empty saloons, the idle breweries and distilleries, took on the hallowed respect of temples overthrown by barbarians.

For months the chief theme of national conversation was drink, and the chief avocation of the citizens seemed to be the preparation for the great denial of 1919. In 2348 B.C., when the Deluge was announced, Noah, then in his six-hundredth year, made preparations for it, almost alone. But 4267 years later the multitudes took thought for the drought of prohibition.

The courts were racked with appeals to decide how much alcohol constituted alcohol. A professor set a group of envied college students to drinking 2.75 per cent. beer in quantity to see if it would intoxicate them. He announced that it did not. Yet the Drys refused to respect the experiment and proclaimed that more than half of one per cent. of alcohol was illegal.

The antediluvians laughed at Noah. But the ante-Julyvians did not laugh. They builded themselves cellars and made them reservoirs of intoxicants. In the clubs, they established lockers and packed them with bottles. Later

these lockers were declared illegal. There was a mighty sale of private distilling-machines. The innocent raisin and the unsuspected yeast-cake and the despised prune of the boarding-house were glorified for their gifts of fermentation. Prophets declared that all the alcoholists would become drug-fiends. As a matter of fact, more of them became ice-cream-soda fiends and sweet-stuff gluttons. Club bars sold candy!

And so the United States rolled on into the gloom, or the dawn, as the case might be. There was no Whisky Insurrection, no riotous resistance. On the last night of June there was not even an orgy. As usual the Americans bowed to the law and made their plans to evade it. We treat our laws as our wives their husbands. They promise to love, honor, and obey, but they don't obey.

There is not much risk in prophesying that this crusade will follow the norm of all the others in history, and that the fate which undermines all other projects, good or bad, will let this sublime effort also delapse. If virtue had ever been established by legal enactments, what angels we should be! for of the making of many laws there is no end.

It is not the fault of the chronicler that things are as they are. He cannot help the world or himself by lying about it. So here goes!

Bob's zeal for drunkenness was rendered all the more imperative by the feeling that the time for such relaxations was brief. His thought was, Get drunk in a hurry, for to-morrow 'll be dry.

To many—indeed, to most—readers it would seem far more laudable to say that he took his disappointments honorably, with bravery, dignity, and decency, and rose nobly to meet them—or met some dear old aunt who talked him back to sanctity. But since he did not, and since so many others did not and do not, it is a painful duty to report what happened—to hew to the line and let the chips fall where they may.

Custom and the clock drove Bob first to food. It was the dinner-hour and he decided to pamper himself. He wandered from restaurant to restaurant, and none of them all suited his whim, American, Italian, Greek, or French. He finally entered one of the large hotels, hoping vainly to stumble on a companionship. But he ate alone.

There is a certain feeling of majesty in dining alone in state. And the feeling of majesty is one of the preludes to ignominy. Bob ordered a cocktail—an orange-blossom—to be fetched at once, before he would dictate his further wants to the captain standing by like a stenographer.

He tossed it off and reckoned that another blossom would be twice as good. He commanded it, also some Astrakhan caviar to aid and abet his thirst. He was ordinarily a spare feeder, but to-night he wanted to overwhelm his poor stomach. He took a thin soup and a filet of sole (*né* flounder), a roast and some vegetables, a salad, and a sweet with wine sauce. Alongside he had a glass of sherry, and its somber smack inspired him to champagne. A poor champagne cost ten dollars a bottle by now, and a good champagne twenty-five, going on a hundred. The sharp savor thrilled Bob's tongue to repetition. It seemed proper to give his order in French. His tongue was thickening a bit, but the waiter's Hungarian French was no better than Bob's.

When Bob said, "Garsoan, apportay-m'wa een boot-tay-yee der lar même shang-pang ong-core," the waiter answered, "Vwee, moansure," and brought a quart.

Bob topped off with a liqueur—a green Chartrurzh—and called for the check-k. He noted an odd click to the "k."

The sight of the bill almost sobered him. The waiter's shorthand was impenetrable. But this was the catalogue in plain terms:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | orange-blossom cocktails | $ 80 |
| 1 | glass of sherry | 40 |
| 2 | bottles of vin brut | 20 00 |
| 1 | Astrakhan caviar | 2 00 |
| 1 | consommé | 30 |
| 1 | filet of sole | 75 |
| 1 | roast beef | 1 00 |
| 1 | candied sweet potatoes | 25 |
| 1 | combination salad | 60 |
| 1 | pudding with wine sauce | 30 |
| 1 | bread and butter | 10 |
| | Total | $26 50 |

And it had been a simple meal, too, aside from the liquid section! By the time he added the customary tithe for

the waiter it made thirty dollars look so sickly that Bob put a twenty and a ten on the tray and murmured:

"Keep change."

He sighed, less at the profligacy of dumping on his poor stomach enough to keep an Armenian family indefinitely than at the perfidy of dining alone. In the afternoon, he had promised to dine with his mother at Aunt Sally's. Later, he had promised to dine on a dining-car with his bride-to-have-been. And now he dined alone.

He thought so tenderly of his mother that tears of unusual facility welled in his fogging eyes. His notably loose lips pursed and quivered. He told himself that he was a misiserable brute and didn't deserve such a mothother.

The confession of guilt only served to render him more desperate. He felt as guilty as Cain, and seemed to be under an equal compulsion to wander instead of seeking his poor mother.

He tipped the waiter a little deal more than he need have, and a good deal less than the waiter had expected from his condition. So he got no thanks. The headwaiter seemed to glower at him as he passed out. Different guests snickered or shook their heads in sorrow over him, according to their natures.

It struck him that the girl who brought his hat was remarkably good-looking, and it seemed to be his solemn duty to tell her so. He said, with academic purity of intention:

"Do you mind my tellin' you how estrornily prithee you are to-night? You don't, do you—or do you?"

She did not mind, and when he dropped both the hat she offered him and the quarter he offered her she picked them up before he could reach them. Then he said:

"Thass right, li'l' lady, always be p'lite to us old folks, and we'll always-zz leave you a millillion dollollars in our wills."

He liked this ever so much, and laughed heartily as he drifted thence.

The hat-girl followed him with her eyes, and looked prettier yet for the little glint of tears stuck on her long lashes.

He picked his way cautiously through a peculiarly stupid lot of people who kept bumping into him. He went down a flight of steps that rose to meet his feet with unexpected

promptness. It was like walking across bedsprings. The sidewalk outside was a trifle better fastened down, and the evening air had such cool hands for his hot forehead that he took off his hat to allow them freer play.

He wandered into the theater district, and the blazing letters piled against the sky, the drunken riot of lights that flashed up and out, the serpentine dances of red and green fires that chased each other here and there about the flaming signboards, bewildered him. It was a kind of municipal *delirium tremens*.

The plays that attracted his curiosity were sold out, and the others did not interest him. He rolled up Broadway, past moving-picture cathedrals, and temples of vaudeville and of drama and comic opera. But he finally landed in a theater devoted to what used to be called a leg-show. Amazing, that such spectacles should be such excellent merchandise!

This crowded house was almost exclusively patronized by men to whose standardized desires it purveyed standardized burlesque. Bob found no stimulant in the strident voices and the striding tights of the chorus or the tawdry caricatures of the Jewish and Irish comedians—impossible gargoyles disporting among decrepit sirens.

The atmosphere was so thick with smoke that the audience seemed to be trying to spread a merciful veil over the infirmities the jades were compelled to expose for a livelihood—a very deadly livelihood, Bob found it. The smoke made him drowsy.

He did not want to sleep yet—nor there. So he clambered out and accepted a return-check lest he hurt the doorman's feelings. A newsboy asked for the check, but Bob virtuously refused to assist in the youth's depravity, and threw the check into one of the rubbish-cans that gaped at every corner.

He was lonely beyond endurance. He would have treated any acquaintance as a long-lost brother, but he could encounter none. A few cab-drivers muttered invitations to marvelous wickedness, but Bob was not one of those in whom Dionysos calls for Aphrodite.

There were ghosts along the darker streets, too; ghosts of good women condemned for a certain term to walk the night inviting others into the hell from which they could

not fly. But Bob was not interested in this shabby committee of welcome whose delegates alone extend hospitality to errant strangers in the cities.

Other companionship was not offered him. The town was dull out-of-doors. The theaters were full, and at the moving-picture houses long lines still stood at the box-offices, waiting for the crowds to come out and make room for the 9.30 audience.

Bob walked and grew more and more fagged. At nearly every corner was a saloon, the great American institution whose fate was supposed to be sealed—and small loss to civilization.

Now and then Bob stopped at one of these and threw into his helpless stomach another riddle for digestion. He could hardly tell one saloon from another. They were all, indeed, as much alike in furniture and populace as in the mortgages that smothered most of them. The windows and signs were akin; each had its side-door "Family Entrance"—and the same families inside: a few foot-sore streetwalkers; a stupefied client, or a platonic friend, perhaps; a general air of dismal mystery about nothing worth while.

The bar-rooms were all alike—a long dark bar with a long brass foot-rail and an array of spittoons. The war had driven out of existence the once familiar free-lunch counter with its public fork or two in a glass of unclean water, and its débris of pretzels, beets, rye-bread crusts—always looking as if there had been something there once.

Along the bar there was everywhere a sparse congregation of males, some of them neat and in a hurry, most of them dejected and in no hurry at all. These latter told their stupid troubles to the neat and patient barkeepers, who stood up straight, combed the froth off the beer, refilled the various whisky-bottles from the same stock, washed all the glasses in the same basin, usually forgot to ring up the coin on the ornate gilded cash-register, and made change out of the open drawer.

Of all the human institutions, the saloon has been the least beautiful, cheerful, and useful; and even the lovers of liquor had little to say in its defense. Some called it the poor-man's club; it was certainly a poor man's-club and it kept its patrons poor. It was the cesspool of riot and dis-

order, and the first step in keeping the peace was always to close the saloon. If it could be closed out forever, so mote it be.

It was of Bob's individuality to grow more haughty and intolerant as he went into eclipse. Being in a dinner-coat, he passed for a swell in the bar-rooms; he lived up to and far beyond the rôle.

Befuddled strangers who tried to tell him how much they had done for their wives and how ill they had been requited were stared out of countenance with what grew more and more like a pair of glass eyes.

Bob zigzagged up Broadway and Seventh Avenue into the dark region of the automobile-supply shops, then he turned and bore south again. He could not get a seat at the Winter Garden, and he was too impatient to join the queues at the Rialto, Rivoli, or the Strand movie-mansions. Churchill's, the Palais Royal, and the Café de Paris were at this hour tenanted only by waiters. The cabarets and revues would not begin till the human crevasse broke from the theaters.

Though it was increasingly hard to walk straight on the increasingly wabbly pavements, he made a visit to a number of restaurants with French names. The names brought back such tender memories of Paris that he called to pay his respects. He found that the resemblance ended with the names, which were changed with great frequency as proprietor after proprietor went broke in the hazardous business of purveying food and amusement to the whimsical public.

It was terrifying to find how small an oasis encompassed all the bright spots of New York; a few steps off a few gaudy streets and he was in the abodes of silence and gloom—dull lanes of shut shops and houses asleep.

Fifth Avenue, with many of its decorations for soldier-welcome still on view, was a boulevard abandoned to the moon, a solitude whose perfection was hardly marred by the motors that went through it at a speed unchecked by the traffic police of broad day.

Bob shuddered at finding himself so far out of bounds, and preferred the more inhabited realm of Sixth Avenue, with its noisy elevated and surface cars, its drug-stores, flower-shops, saloons, and restaurants.

He was tired enough to sit down on a curbstone and rest

his aching feet in the gutter till the sidewalk stopped its merry-go-round. But he was not quite drunk enough to be indifferent to appearances.

He had by no means drowned his struggling pride, and his remorse was buoyant. He went into a restaurant where a bevy of hard-working cabaret girls was doing stunts before a small and scattered audience more interested in its food and its own affairs.

The lot of restaurant musicians is a wretched one, continually casting pearls of melody before indifferent gobblers and guzzlers. The violinist here was playing wildly well, a 'cellist was making moan, and a pianist of skill was pouring out his soul. No one listened, waiters crisscrossed, plates clattered, laughter cackled and drowned a very rapture of sorrow.

Bob dropped into a chair and ordered another orange-blossom for his Bacchic wreath. The music reached him. He felt the sob of it and his own heart rocked to its sway.

He had reasons enough for regret, drunk or sober, but, drunk, he had an exalted capacity for emotion. He thought of his poor mother, of his poor April, of his poor tormented head. He thought tenderly even of Kate, and if she had appeared before him with a parson or a justice of the peace he would have married her as handsomely as he could. Had the preacher asked him if he would take this woman for his wedded wife, he would have answered in the words of a certain eminent poet in a similar condition on a similar occasion, "I cert'nly will, and I thank you for thopportunithy!"

But Kate did not appear, and Bob's sympathy went out to a young girl whose talents were as scant as her clothes, but whose anxieties were as great as her eyes; for Prohibition was expected to put an end to the cabarets and to the salaries of vast flocks of nightbirds who had swarmed from oblivion into the restaurants, and might soon swarm back again to silent and graceless toil.

This young person sang and danced, and Bob alone applauded her. He had no desire for love, but he had a surplus of despair to divide with somebody. He beckoned to the singer, and she graciously sat down with him and consented to split a split with him. This was a part of her work.

Bob had a wild idea that he ought to marry her and save her from the future. But he thought he had better get

acquainted with her and not indulge again in what his mother had called "marriage at first sight." It is, unfortunately, impossible for a young man of high ideals to go about saving all the girls he meets. Bob said to this brand in the burning:

"You sing beauthifully, mam'selle—excuse Frensh, but I got the habit over there—over there. I've heard some fine singeresses, but I'll tell the worl' you're beaucoup chanturze."

"Thank you, thank you," said the maiden, uncomfortably. The wine came and the waiter poured it into their glasses. And the little *diva* saved herself from a proposal by saying, "Well, here's lookin' at you."

If she had murmured, "Drink to me only with thine eyes," Bob would probably have offered her his hand and his honorable name, but the inelegant triteness of her toast offended him. He paid for the wine grimly and said:

"Sorry can't stop to marry you, mam'selle, but 'nother engagement, if you know what I mean."

She didn't, but she said she did, and he held her hand and patted it in a fatherly fashion. He would have kissed it, but he had found that when he bent his head a rush of hot fumes threatened to make a volcano of his skull.

He marched out earnestly, taking great heed of his steps, and continued his search for fellowship. It was only for politeness that he had just said he had another engagement. Yet he had one, though he did not know it. The big trouble he was looking for was looking for him.

## CHAPTER XIII

BY this time the theaters were disgorging their multitudes into Broadway and the various side-streets near Forty-second.

The sidewalks were like a log-jam; the roadways were as full of taxicabs, limousines, and other vehicles as infected blood-vessels with bacilli. All the cars were hooting, squawking, darting. Electric call-boards were flashing numbers. Boys and men were darting this way and that, paging limousines and hunting for taxicabs. The traffic police performed their maddening tasks like gods turning chaos into system.

Bob was caught in a mass of humanity and upheld and carried along in the molasses-flow. The forlornly empty hotels and restaurants filled up and the headwaiters told him they were fuller than they were.

The headwaiters' learned eyes recognized that Bob was also full. He was pleasantly turned away at the Knickerbocker, Claridge's, the Astor, the Café de Paris, Churchill's, and the Palais Royal.

Chop-suey signs blinked at him in great numbers, but their gaudy banquet-rooms were all up-stairs and they did not tempt him.

He got in at a place whose title was as Parisian as the cuisine was not. The tables surrounded a quadrangle where couples spun in dances, inspired by a screaming jazz band made of gargled saxophones, ribald clarinets, nasal cornets with wooden stoppers in their bells, and a satirical trombone that laughed a titanic ha-ha-ha-ha!

The dancers looked like gunmen and shoplifters. They were probably haberdashers and stenographers.

At the table next to Bob a very tall man, with eyes that seemed to be looking through a bandage of mist, listened absently to the maunderings of a besotted little woman with a crumpled mouth which never got far from the brim of her

glass, but talked across it incessantly. She was reminiscent, apparently, of some quondam gallant whom she had jilted or been jilted by.

"That fell' did noth'n' but talk 'bout 'mself the whole damtime, 'r if wasn' talk'n' 'bout 'mself, 's talk'n' 'bout's wife—she mus' 'v'ad mos' awful disp'sish any one ev'rad. Use' talk 'bout 's chil'ren, too. My Gawd! I know that fam'ly like I lived with't all m'life. Funny, huh? how people 'll al's talk 'bout 'selves, never 'bout you."

The deep yearning to blab was a passion with her, but Bob tired of her doleful reminiscences. At his other elbow all was merriment; a fat man was enormously amused by the cachinnations of his fat wife. She said nothing at all; just bubbled as inarticulately as a hot Welsh rabbit, breaking out now and then into cadenzas of that boozy laughter that carries its confession to long distances.

Her husband, who was less notoriously boozy, kept trying to moderate her ecstasies: "Not s' loud, shweetie. 'Sh! 'sh! not s' loud. Folksh 'll think y'had t'mush liq'r."

Finally he persuaded her to start for home and radiator-side. The narrow aisle seemed to be a blown rope in the wind and she an inexperienced tight-rope walker.

One of the waiters tried to steady her down the line, but the husband smiled:

"Never mind. She sall right. I'm goin' to shoot her, anyway, soon's I get her home."

Bob decided that he was in the wrong place. If he stayed here much longer he would lose his respect for inebriety, and he had a passionate longing to be drunk. He paid for his highball and paid a hat-girl for his hat, saying, with genial irony:

"This ol' hat is costing me so much to-night, señorita, that I reckon I'll just have one painted on my head. Save pile money, eh? Well, goo' night."

He turned back down Broadway and managed to get into one of the big hotels by mingling with a large and gorgeous party. He did not mean to force himself among them, but he could not get out, once in.

He was about to float into the dining-room when an alert hat-boy darted after him and seized his hat from him. Bob seized the hat again, reciting, solemnly:

"Hat-boy, spare that hat-at,
Touch not a shingle bow-wow.
In youth it sheltered me-me
And I'll protect it now-ow. Poetry."

"Yes, sir," the dazed youth responded, but still clung to the brim. Bob was patient.

"Hat-boy, this hat-at will go down in hist-hick-ory with the hat my fellow-stateshman, Georz Wash'n'on, wore at Wa'rloo, and helmet of Navarre, and—and soforth. It will cost me a dime to leave it with you?"

"That's as you like, sir."

"Then I'll pay you a quarter of one dollar if you will graciously permit me to keep it. I don't want to cash cold or anything."

"Yessir."

Bob ransomed his hat and moved on; the boy turned to his fellow-pickhat and muttered, "There's a guy's been fighting the booze and the booze win."

The head headwaiter checked Bob's advance. "The tables are all taken, sir."

"I see half-dozen as empty as I am," said Bob.

"But they are reserved, sir."

"I regret to say I don't believe you."

"But—"

"Get out of my way or I'll breathe on you and ignite you."

There were the makings of a lively scene, and the headwaiter was beckoning his forces to repel the boarder, when April ran forward impulsively.

It was the bravest thing she had ever done. In her country a young gentleman in his cups was treated with Samaritan consideration, and it seemed less terrible to her to go to Bob's rescue than to sit by and watch him thrown out like a tramp.

She had left him in bitterness that afternoon, her pride, her love outraged by his disloyalty. She had broken down so completely that she let her mother and Pansy put her to bed. She had cried herself out by six o'clock, and a fit of restlessness had driven her frantic.

Life stretched ahead of her interminably intolerable. The

oncoming evening was more than she could face. As long as she had had Bob for a prospective future, quiet evenings at home had been easy to bear. She could sit and knit sweaters, or stand and dabble in clay, or write letters, or just muse. But now that she was suddenly widowed before she was wifed, her emotions were stampeded.

Hugo Clyde had called up and invited her to go to the theater with him, and her mother had implored her to accept, but she had not yet passed the crest of her hysteria, and she had refused.

Then Bob's mother telephoned in wild excitement that Bob's marriage had been postponed vaguely. April waited in a frenzy of hope, but when she heard nothing more she plummeted still deeper into gloom.

Walter Reece had telephoned at the proper moment of reaction and she had accepted his invitation in a spirit of defiance to fate and to Bob. Walter explained that Claudia's major-general had a box for "East Is West," and urged April to bring her mother along for chaperon.

This took the edge off the escapade, but April had insisted that her mother should drag her doubly broken heart out of solitude. Poor Mrs. Summerlin's East was West, too; her whole compass was crumpled, and she consented to be coerced.

The delightfully impossible plot of the play was rendered plausible by the art of Fay Bainter and George Nash and Lester Lonergan and the rest, and the theater served its magic purpose of consoling the audience's real woes by the exploitation of the characters' imaginary problems.

After the theater, General Petherbridge had proposed supper, and led his flock to the restaurant where Bob was the last person on earth April expected to see.

She had been startled by the sight of his high brow as he parleyed with the hat-boy. She had blushed from head to foot while she waited for Kate Yarmy to come forward.

She was dazed to realize that Bob was alone, and curiosity rivaled her fantastic joy. Her muscles made ready to spring forward before her discretion could check them.

When she saw that Bob was drunk regret and pity brought swift tears to her eyes. The contemptuous rebuff he received from the headwaiter enraged her. That foreigner,

that waiter was about to lay hand on a Taxter from Virginia! Well, not while a Summerlin from Virginia lived!

April was a gimper by instinct and ideal, and she had acted before she realized what she was doing.

Bob was shocked almost sober by her abrupt apparition at his side and her calm rebuke of the headwaiter.

"Mr. Taxter is with our party at General Petherbridge's table."

The headwaiter bowed in homage and became at once the eager chamberlain. He hurried forward, snapping his fingers and ordering a chair placed for Mr. Taxter.

Bob was shocked almost sober, but his brain was too saturated to throw off its fumes, and the fog settled down upon him. His voice was so resonant and his joviality so excessive that April was crimson with shame as she guided his uncertain footsteps to the table.

"Who zhoo say's in your party?" Bob demanded.

"Mother and Claudia and Walter and General Petherbridge."

This ponderous name amused Bob's infantile humor immeasurably:

"Not old Arshibald Pether-pether-snidge? Well, as I live and breeze!"

Bob laughed so uproariously that April wished she had let the waiters eject him. He shook hands with the other guests amiably enough, but he guffawed in the face of the scarlet old warrior.

It has been wisely noted that alcohol is never a stimulant, but always a narcotic, and only seems to stimulate because it drugs in some persons the faculties that shackle the social instincts, while in other persons it drugs the faculties that give law to lawless instincts. When the policemen's union struck, in Boston, and released all the criminals from restraint that was a parallel to alcoholism. When Chicago lowered the street-lamps one night to save coal during the coal strike, and crime went up as the lights went down, that was another.

Bob was a living sermon now for Prohibition. His self-respect, his military traditions of respect for superior officers, his ordinary courtesy to women, his taste for inconspicuousness, were all sent disgracefully to sleep. An impish inso-

lence, a puerile desire to break things, a primeval longing to make a noise and show off, felt the slackening of the leash and broke free.

It seemed to him to be the wittiest thing in the world to call General Petherbridge "Old Arshie Featherbed." The poor hero of the Argonne felt like a stranded whale. His joviality was turned to confusion. He wanted to humor the idiot Bob was, and he tried to remind himself that he was in a non-military republic where the uniform was once more a handicap rather than a robe of authority, but he was furious. He regretted the inhibitions of sobriety, and yearned to be drunk long enough to break a plate over Bob's skull.

Bob was in a poetic vein, and was moved to celebrate the hapless general in verse:

"Arshie, there's li'l' poem about you. Thanks; I will recite it. Cue for jazz ban'—zing!—sizzle-sozzle—sizzle-sozzle—zing!—zang!—zing! Humpty-Dumpty sat on a wall—on a wall—on a wall. Humpity-Dumpity had a great fall—great-a-fall—great-a-fall. All the king sorses and all the king smen Couldn't get little old Zheneral Arshibaldhead Feather-bedhead up on that wall again— Why, hello, Mrs. Shum'lin! You're lookin' simply lovely. I rise to propose toas' to—"

April, in a nausea, tugged at his coat and pleaded:

"Sit down and behave—if you can!"

"'If I can,'" Bob quoted, haughtily. "Cer'nly I can. I know how to behave. I'm fed up on etiquetty. But I'm s'perior to my information. But if you're such shtickler for good form, don't interrupt speaker about to propose toas' to lovely lady—your sainted muzzer. Arshie, lend me your glash. No? Oh, very well! Old Stingy-stingy! My name's Little Bobby-buy-the-booze. Waiter! What ho, without there! Where's about forty waiters? Varlet, come hither! I would have some wine—ho!"

April rose hastily. "I think I'll go home."

"Let's," said Bob.

She dropped into her chair. "I think I'll stay."

"Let's," said Bob. He put his arm about the waiter's neck for support, and spoke with royal kindliness: "Minion—for whom I have greates' affection—let beakers be brought and eke wassail. Do you know what wassail is?"

"No sir!"

"Correct. Neither do I. Let's shift to some grand old bourbon whissikey—what?"

"Yessir."

"Also a few rickety gins and—"

April shook her head at the waiter and tried prayer on Bob:

"I implore you, dear, to remember where you are."

Bob's godhead was not listening to prayers. "Don't try to reform me in public, April. I consis'ntly refuse to be reformed in public places." He turned to Walter Reece:

"Wal'r, dear old Walrush, what you having?"

"Thanks, Bob; I'm on the water-wagon."

"Is 'at so? Dear, dear! Of all forms locomotion, I leas' admire watermobile." Then he turned to the waiter, "Do I get my order or do I not?"

"No!" said April, trying autocracy. "Sit down at once. I insist! Your voice is attracting attention."

"You insist! ha-ha! also ho-ho! Well, little insister, in a lowered tone permit me to say you can't run me. At least not till after the wedding-bells have tolled their doleful toll. Ping-pong-pong-pong!"

April's patience was gone. "Those wedding-bells will never toll for us!"

Bob had entirely forgotten Kate's existence. He was back in the glorious days of being engaged to and disengaged from April:

"You cast me off, do you? Very well; then I will celebrate my in'pen'ence by magnificent spree. Do I get my liquor or do I tear this gilded palace of shin to shreds? Wine-ho! I repeat."

The headwaiter came up in considerable distress.

"I'm sorry, sir, but the wine-cellar is closed, sir."

This infuriated Bob. "Stuff and nonsense! Don't trifle with me. I won't have it! Bring me a drink—mush drink—instanter!"

"No more drinks are to be had, sir. I'm sorry, sir."

At this moment a waiter came in from another room, trundling a perambulator full of bottles of cocktail ingredients and other palatable venoms. Before he could be warned away Bob caught sight of him and beckoned him:

"Ah, here comes my friend. Little lad with the fire-water-wagon. You may approach."

The headwaiter gesticulated. April rose in terror. Others at other tables rose in fascinated expectancy.

The liquor-charioteer paused, wheeled, and tried to escape. Bob darted after him, caught him, and, seizing a bottle and a glass, prepared to pour oil on his inner fires.

But the militia of the restaurant had been trained for this sort of emergency. It enlivened the dull rounds of their toil, and they gathered with a zest.

The traitorous alcohol that made Bob a son of battle did not inspire him in the field, but rendered him inaccurate of aim and infirm of strategy. He potted a nose or two, and there was some breakage of china and glass as he went out, clutching at table-cloths, swiping at faces that were not there when his fist arrived, and threatening slaughter that he could not achieve.

April's heart would have ached with sympathy for him, and she would have been tempted to go to his rescue if he had not made so deplorable an exhibition of himself in her duel with his inebriated soul.

She had had a hard day of it with Bob, and he had trampled her pride in the afternoon as recklessly as in the evening. She had appealed in vain both to Bob sober and to Bob drunk.

She washed her hands of him and turned her back on the appalling indignity of his exit.

The waiters marched him to the door and out into the street, and flung him to the public as if he were garbage. He made an effort or two to force his way back, but only to be disjected again.

The management had no desire to appear in the police court and did not call for the police. And there chanced to be no policeman at hand.

If there had been, Bob would have tried conclusions with him and all his cohorts. He was in an Ajax mood, but he could not evoke any lightning.

Disappointed at every turn, he began to weep bitterly. He found a congenial listener, who helped to support him into a side-street where there were few passers-by to stare.

The stranger was a Samaritan for sympathy, but he charged for his services. He found Bob's wallet and appropriated it. Then he left Bob on the steps of a high-stooped, untenanted house and went his way.

If Bob had not previously stuffed a little money into a trousers-pocket he would have been left entirely without funds for prosecuting his search for real excitement.

For the moment he sat and wept like another Alexander because he could find no worlds to conquer.

This much-advertised Babylon was as dismally virtuous as the Sahara Desert.

# Book V
# LOVE GOES OUT

## CHAPTER I

A MORE unheroic place, mood, and posture for a hero than Bob Taxter's would be hard to imagine. An author often has an experience common to a marrier: the chosen hero or heroine turns out to be full of unsuspected and ineradicable faults, discovered all too late. Many authors, like many matrimonial victims, thereupon devote themselves to concealing from the public the terrible truth; they lie about, gloss over, and suppress everything that is not pretty. Like photographers, they retouch every blemish and leave only a pale blur.

But Bob must not be disguised. Such dishonesty may safely be left to the writers of moral and respectable fiction.

Still, it is increasingly apparent that it would have been advisable to select a higher type of American soldier for this biography. There is Sergeant Yorke, for instance, the mountaineer who went to war unwillingly, killed and captured more prisoners than any other Yank, came home loaded with medals, went back to his humble peaks, married the girl he had left behind, and set out on a lecture tour, with a side ambition to destroy the vice of cigarettes and rescue America from the tobacco demon. There is Lieutenant Maynard, the young preacher, a premature angel who flew from New York to California and back with celestial speed, and was terrified by nothing except the immodest costumes of New York women and the fierce response to his statements that American aviators were addicted to liquor.

A million better heroes than Bob might have been found among the soldiers and sailors and marines who went into the war from the noblest motives, came out resanctified, and took up earnest missions for the good of mankind.

Their achievements were bruited abroad in tall head-lines, and they deserved their fame. Yes, it was a grave error to select a Bob Taxter for record. It is hard to find a single bit of hero-plasm in him. He went into the air because he loved

adventure. He went to the war, not because he loved humanity, but because he hated Germany, and he hated Germany mainly because his country had declared war on Germany.

He fought without piety or prayer. He fought like a fiend, cursing and blaspheming. He wept because the war died under him before he had satisfied his thirst for gore. He got out of the uniform as quickly as he could, and proceeded to flirt with another girl while he quarreled with his fiancée.

When he found himself unexpectedly possessed of ten thousand dollars, did he rejoice at the opportunity to devote his future to the betterment of the poor, or the foundation of a chair of learning, or social welfare? Not in the slightest. It never occurred to him to give it away magnanimously. He revealed a disgusting ambition to get rich quick. He showed deplorable traits of envy and jealousy, and tried to get richer quicker than his betrothed.

Even in his investment he let himself be duped, and would have been swindled out of his money by a pair of crooks if it had not been stolen from him by an old, doddering Senegambian.

He let his chivalry make a fool of him, and would have let it drag him to the altar with a woman he did not love. And again he was saved from disaster only by the desperate inspirations of a stupid ex-slave.

Then, did he reform like the Prodigal, and turn homeward repentant? He did not! He avoided his only living parent, and went out with no finer ambition than a lust for liquor and general rampage. Even here a pack of waiters tore him from his apogee and cast him into outer darkness.

And now he slumped on the old foot-bitten steps of a house with six "To Let" signs on it, and he wept—wept with remorse because he had debased his aristocracy, disgraced his breeding and his opportunities, and belittled the proud name he bore? Not by a jugful—not by a tear-jugful! He wept because he could not get as drunk as he wanted to, and nobody would fight him.

When he arose at length, with a high resolve, was it to lead a better life? It was not. The thing that straightened his floppy legs and lifted his swimming head was a sudden happy thought that perhaps he could find a policeman who would

give him a good battle. His ambition now was to put out one of New York's guardians of the peace, take his club and cap away, and flaunt them himself.

A fine flower of generations of freedom, compulsory education, equality, and opportunity in the greatest country on earth, by its own admission!

The misguided historian and the misled reader must do all the repenting for wasting all this time, and all this space that might have been occupied by beautiful deeds of wisdom and grandeur, or by the fiction of uplift that shows how a virtuous hero may overcome all the villainies of the villainous if he but keep his heart pure and his head clear of stimulant or sedative fumes.

The only thing to do in the premises is to get this miserable fellow out of his present predicament as rapidly and decently as possible, then leave him to muddle through the rest of his erratic career without further record.

This task is fortunately rendered simple by the fact that Bob found, to his regret (in which the gentle reader will not share, of course), that New York was a damnably uninteresting sink of propriety after midnight—a welter of sleepy burghers, somber dance-halls, and an endless monotony of dark streets.

Furthermore, in spite of many travelers' tales to the contrary, the New York policeman is the politest, peacefulest philanthropist on earth. He spends his time saving myopic imbeciles from walking into or driving into destruction; he is always courteous when fairly bespoken, and his patience with drunkards would make Job throw up his job.

Bob wasted a good deal of time looking for a policeman. There are only ten thousand of them required to keep the traffic of New York's five or six million wanderers in order, and at this hour most of them were in bed or playing authors or parcheesi in the back rooms of the station-houses.

While he looked for a policeman Bob paused to inspect several restaurants. Their stodgy respectability disheartened him, and he would not have lingered even if he had been urged to, which he was emphatically not.

Three or four places offered dances, cabarets, and revues of splendor, and he tried to force his way into Healy's "Golden Glades," but was rebuffed at the door.

A cabman outside offered to take him to the glories of Pabst's, in Harlem. It was a long way to 125th Street, and, once there, Bob was informed that only gentlemen with ladies and ladies with gentlemen were admitted to the ballroom.

By the time he had been jolted back down-town his money was almost gone, and his time was all gone. It was one o'clock, the very closing hour when waiters yawn and bakeries give up their bread.

Bob was almost frantic as he saw the front doors of cafés and cabarets being folded together and locked on the heels of evicted lingerers. Here and there a few were permitted to finish their cheese and crackers behind drawn curtains. But the town was on its way up-stairs.

One famous all-night haven occurred to Bob as a last resort. He hastened to Jack's on Sixth Avenue. Even here he found the doors bolted! He tapped frantically on the glass, but a waiter within shook a doleful head and yawned. Everybody had the gapes but Bob.

He clung like the Peri at the gate of Paradise, but the gate would not yield to his prayers. As he stumbled away he had the companionship in misery of two taxicab-loads of thirsty men, who rolled up and rolled out too late.

They mingled their groans with Bob's, but their lamentations were drowned by the fremebund passage of an elevated train thundering overhead with the uproar of a polyphlœsbœan billow. That Juggernaut of respectability was carrying the final roisterers back to the pillows and penates of all Up-town.

An unutterable loneliness overwhelmed poor Bob. He felt as taunted as Coleridge's wretches. They had "water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink"; and Bob had people, people everywhere, and nary place to drink. Bob was as epically lonely as the young hero of Charles Hanson Towne's beautiful poem, "Manhattan."

New York had no dark life then. It was as dull in the afternoon of night as London had been for decades, and Paris since the war. Paris had not yet reverted to its old gaiety. Its somnambulant waiters had got into the habit of going home at one o'clock, and they were reluctant to resume the ancient ways.

The one-o'clock closing law of war-time still clamped the lid on New York, and would long prevail. Wherever Bob went, prowling for a refuge from the dark streets, he found the cafés darker still.

It was not that all New York was innocently abed. There were carousals in private resorts, gambling in secluded spots, dances going full tilt in many a gleaming ballroom and many a shabby hall. Vice was industrious here and there, but generally asleep. Young girls of all ages were still reading themselves awake with novels. Students a few were poring over lessons, and capitalists were insomniac over the problems of making the world safe for the labor unions.

But these places were not for strangers, and even the haunts of vice, especially the haunts of vice, were cautious against unknown visitors.

Like another wandering Jew, Bob's dreary pilgrimage was all in vain. Dairy lunch-rooms were open in plenty, and chop-suey joints, grotesque and tawdry, offered him innumerable Chinese distortions of chicken and rice, also bamboo shoots and quaint rubberoid delicacies. But Bob did not want tea.

He asked many a fellow-exile upon the dreary streets for counsel, and one and all told him to be glad he was as full as he was, and not ask too much. He quizzed taxicab men and even the dolorous drivers of horses, but they shook their heads, and their glum refrain was: "N' Yawk's dead. The little old boig ain't what she used to was."

Bob would not give up hope, and he covered a vast amount of territory, with frequent pauses to rest his feet and squeeze his skull together.

By three o'clock he was desperate enough for human society and refreshment, even solid, to enter one of the constellation of Childs' dairy lunch-rooms—the one in Columbus Circle.

Here, to his amazement, he found a strange and unbelievable assemblage of gentlemen and ladies in full evening dress, mingled with the usual small fry that eat at the darkest hour before the dawn.

It had come to be a fashion, even before it became a necessity, for those who had danced themselves hungry in the early morning to flock to the dairy lunch-rooms for food.

The first adventurers discovered to their surprise that these places offered entertainment for the stomach no less delicious than the ancient products of the foreign cuisiniers. They found here no squabs and pâtés, salads and méringues, nor even any lobsters and terrapin, crab-meats and clams.

But they found national inventions of equal toothsomeness and equally interesting as sporty hazards for the digestion.

Here a *spécialité de la maison* was the last word in the exquisite: the fried-egg sandwich, which would be as poetical as *omelette aux fines herbes* or any of the thousand forms of oval disguise, if only a foreign poet would rave over its wealth of gold in a white-satin envelop laid between two sheets of bread, with the added benison of a great circle of Bermuda onion, white as a watch-dial and sweet as candy.

The *cordon bleu* of this tavern prided himself on certain marshmallowy crumpets of bulging creaminess between blistered surfaces made wonderfully savory with butter plunged into their snowy insides. Buttercakes are less satisfactory after they have been plunged into one's own insides, and hence their popular or unpopular name is "sinkers." Fair, but false, they melt like edible evanescence on the tongue, but lie like paper-weights on the stomach—"wax to receive, but marble to retain."

Here one could suit his whim by choosing between two famous dishes, "Ham and Boston," or "Ham and New York"—the word "beans" being always understood. This *plat de nuit* consists of a slice of ham (or, if one prefer, of beef or corned beef) supporting a load of beans, looking like clusters of brown grapes if cooked in the individualistic style known as "Boston," or looking like a porridge if cooked "New York."

The dairy lunch leans heavily, of course, on pies—on all the pies in season—and the canned seasons are perennial.

But best of all were the cakes—those buckwheat cakes of which Matthew Arnold, being coerced to nibble during his American lecture tour, said in his most Athenian manner to his wife, "Try them, my d'yah; they're not hahf so nahsty as they look."

For this the poet merited the rebuke that Doctor Johnson (perhaps) administered to one who spoke slightingly of the

Venus de' Medici, "That remark, sir, is not a criticism; it is a confession." It was almost a sacrilege.

Here, as in all good lunch-rooms, at the windows stood the white-capped buckwheat priests in their white aprons, before their black, iron altars, with the vestal gas-fires that never go out. At the call of those musical words, "Brown the bucks, one," a priest poured on the surface the batter from the pitcher, in a coil that became in time a disk of ambrosia, creaming and browning and freckling and rising with a yeastly yearning. Very like to love are buckwheat cakes. For there is nothing more blissful hot, and nothing more loathsome cold, than a buckwheat cake, unless it be love.

It was not strange that the beauty and the chivalry of New York should in time discover that they were allowing the poor to monopolize ecstasies that were far too good for them. Love they could not deny the poor, but the rich had too long denied themselves midnight cakes and syrup, with coffee and scalded milk drawn from nickel-plated caldrons like silver turrets.

Bob stared in unbelief at the sight of all these swells putting away eggs and beans and pies and cakes, and at the belles who threw back their gorgeous cloaks and bent forward in silken opulence to feast on what was once considered grub for the poor and the hasty. One dreamy-eyed sultana lifted in her jeweled fingers a tiny pewter ewer of maple syrup, and trickled it over the butter-gilded buckwheats as if she were eking out a very precious ointment.

The place was murmurous with swagger merriment that had somehow managed (as the well-dressed always do) to give a look of dissipation to the most innocent activities.

Bob saw one indubitable wastrel eating a bowl of graham crackers and milk with a manner positively Trimalchian.

Bob stared and turned away. The thought of syrup and cakes wrung his parched tongue to a revulsion. Maple syrup was to him what water is to a mad dog. With a howl of saccharophobia Bob turned and fled back into the night.

And now at last he found a policeman to challenge. He was not so young and fit as Bob would have liked, but he had a club and a cap that Bob decided to acquire as trophies of the most unsatisfactory day and night of his existence.

## CHAPTER II

OFFICER DERMOT TWOMEY was as peaceable a man as ever came out of Ballinasloe, that two-county town half Galway and half Roscommon. He had been trained to compromise as a boy there where neither county faction could move the town to its side of the line.

In all the dissensions that had torn the Irish heart for the last five years, and were rending it now, Twomey quarreled with nobody, not with those who upheld President De Valera of the Irish Republic, nor with those who were for Plunkett's plan; not even with those who approved of the incorrigible Carson. Twomey was a much-needed sort of Irishman.

He had spent a long evening on post in the theater district, his relief had been delayed, and he had lingered at the station-house making out his reports, till now, at three o'clock, he was on his way home to his wife and the littlest two of his six children, who knew so well how well he admired them asleep that they always pretended to be asleep when he came home, no matter how much noise he made.

The policeman's heart was full of song and philanthropy. His cap was pushed back to let the moonlit breeze sweep his brow, and he was humming something in Gaelic as he tossed his short club in and out of his hand on a loose wrist-knot.

He was taking the long cut home because he liked Columbus Circle—a fine open space with no very tall buildings to cramp a big sky like a broad blue bosom with silver buttons on it and the moon for a badge.

The Circle was rarely dead at any hour of day or night. At three o'clock the morning papers were already there in big stacks, with gossipy old men and women fussing over them, and a man could have a look at to-morrow's sensation before going to bed to-night.

Then there was usually an Irish county dance or two going

on in Fifty-ninth Street, and early stragglers bound home and willing to stop and have a kindly fight over what Ireland was coming to.

In any case, the Circle itself was always an eyeful. Central Park came up to one side of it, fetching forests and country lanes right into the city. There was the big monument to the men who were lost in the *Maine*, with a fine lot of gold figures at the top of it.

And there was that old Columbus, perched aloft on his rostral column in the center of the street-car tracks, always standing there in an attitude of astonishment at what his little hunt for India had brought upon this dark continent that barred his way.

Twomey used to draw a lesson from it to the effect that a man never knows what he's starting when he starts something —especially a Dago.

Upon his philosophical meditation Bob Taxter intruded with the blatant cynicism of a Diogenes.

Twomey's practised eye recognized from Bob's legs that his burden was almost more than he could bear. And Twomey's heart softened a little in advance. He felt the sorrier for Bob because the lad was plainly driven to an ugly climax and would probably belch up some sour language. But Twomey was as patient with seasick men on land as a steward on a Channel steamer with the victims of a rough crossing. And what Irishman would take umbrage at a mere swipe with a fist? A man doesn't have to hold his head still. He has a neck, hasn't he?

The final degree of Bob's initiation into the Arcadian simplicity of New York night life was an encounter with a non-inflammable policeman.

Bob's first words betrayed the fact that he had no special grudge against Twomey, but merely an academic revolt against coppers in general, and against the fact that he could not get drunk! He was so lit up that he was blinded by his own effulgence.

Twomey only laughed when Bob tried to insult him, revealing none of that inspired alcohol wit so much advertised and so rarely met.

Bob was simply maudlin.

"Say!—you! Zhes, I mean zhoo! You old sparrow-cop!

You goo'-f'r-noth'n gum-shoe constabule in the jayest town on earfthp. I'm goin' lick 'ell out of you an' take your club away an' everything."

"That's a domd good idea," said Twomey. "I'm off duty annyhow, so you're hairtily welkim."

He did not quite give Bob the club, but he gave him support, and he held Bob's lapel crosswise in such a friendly clasp that somehow Bob could not quite reach that smiling face with his fists.

"Would zhoo like know what I think this damtown?" Bob demanded.

"I'm achin' to hear," said Twomey. And Bob got rid of a lot of very rancid language that fascinated such men and women as were to be found in Columbus Circle at that hour, and were amused at drunkards as people used to be amused by the permanently insane.

Twomey sighed at some of Bob's abuse. It was very ancient, and not at all brilliant. A policeman is a sort of trained nurse to people sick of various disorders, from absent-mindedness to absent-consciencedness, and Twomey had heard it all before, from out-of-town people and in-town people. They seemed to feel that it did them some good to denounce that great shapeless nebula called New York—as if New York were something or somebody that could accept rebuke or praise.

When Bob had exhausted his vocabulary New York felt just about the same and Bob was a little easier. But he was no nearer a fight, and Twomey still wore his cap, his club, and that abominable smile. Finally Bob saw a great light. He knew how to enrage this pacifist.

"You 'r'Irish, I reckon," he snarled. Twomey nodded, a little uncomfortably. He hoped the boy would not lay violent hands on the ark of his patriotism and pierce through to certain hidden springs of wrath that might spout in spite of Twomey's self-control. Bob sneered:

"What side were you on in this swar, huh? Whasside you on in this swar?"

"On this side," Twomey sighed.

"Whaddi tell you?" Bob cried. "You didn' go over. You're a dam' pro-Germanirishman, and I knew it firs'stime I saw you."

"I'M GOIN' TAKE YOUR CLUB AWAY AN' EVERYTHING"

"THAT'S A DOMD GOOD IDEA," SAID OFFICER TWOMEY

"And what side were you ahn?" said Twomey, quietly.

"I 's on oth' side water shavin' the worl' for democ'shy. I got li'l' ol' war-crossh 'n' ev'thing."

"And were you now, and did you?" said Twomey. "It may be might be you met one or the both of my boys there. There was Sairgeant Francis X. Twomey of Coompany Ah, and Corpor'l John Pether Twomey of Coompany Haitch. You saw them, belike?"

"What rezhmen' of what d'vision?" Bob demanded, a little more truculently, to hide his embarrassment.

"And what rigiment would it be but the Hoonderd an' Sixty-fi'th Rainbows?"

"You don' shoshay—shay sho!"

Bob saluted and drew himself up so sharply that he would have collapsed like a stack of arms if Twomey had not held him. Then he grew cynical again:

"You never had any sons over there at all—not a dam' tall."

"Two I had," said Twomey. "Wan of them is only partly home; wan of them is stayin' over thayre," said Twomey, his eyes askance, and little muscles in his cheek showing that he had set his jaws on an old cud of grief.

Suddenly Bob was weeping the mobile tears of the drunk. He flung his arm about the father's neck and tried to kiss him, but jiu-jitsu saved the officer again. Being killed by criminals and kissed by drunkards are commonplace perils with the force.

"Zhoo know," Bob sobbed, "I flew over that dam' rezh'-men' once an' I could hear the brogue of the Micks a mile in the air. Well, if you're r'Irishman, you ought to unnerstan' why I've got to fight somebody. If you're a frien' o' mine, you'll gimme a li'l' battle yourself. I just nash'ally got to punsh a p'liceman."

"I'll be glad for to oblige you, but I'm off duty and it wouldn't count. To-morrow I'll meet you wheriver you like."

"Thass a bet!" said Bob. "Let's meet Ma'son Square Gar'n."

"You're ahn! And now hadn't you better be off for home to tune up a bit? You'd be the betther for a little alcohol rub on the outside."

Bob followed this dangled thistle with asinine solemnity: "Thass insp'ration! You're a zhenius, and I'll beat life out of you with greates' poss'ble affection."

"And where might you be havin' your trainin'-quarthers?"

"The Deucalion 's my dump, but I'm not goin' there yet—oh no! the night is still young yet."

"Too bad! for my way lays just apast the Deucalion, and there's a few perliminaries we could be settlin' were you goin' that way."

Bob relented at once:

"Well, o' course, if you're afraid to go home in the dark, I'll protec' you. You're only a poor li'l' p'liceman, and you need chaperon. I'll 'scort you home, but remember! tomorrow I'm goin' to knock your dam' block off."

"That's my understandin' of it entirely," said Twomey.

And so they made their way, the policeman in slow strides and Bob with a corkscrew gait.

Bob had nothing of importance to communicate, but he communicated it in a most important manner; and by means of incessant repetitions he managed to cover all the territory available with a minimum of material.

He talked after the method of a poet writing a triolet, a rondel, or any of those forms with lines incessantly recurrent.

"Whass name, ossifer?" he babbled. "Whass name? I say, whass name? Don't you know y' own name? Typilcal N'York p'liceman! too stoopid know 's own name. Well, needn't get s'mad about it. What'f you did tell me three four times? What else you got to do? Needn't get mad about it. What if you did tell me three four times? What if you told me siss seven ninety times? What else you got to do?

"Manners is somethigg, ossifis!—Whass name? No matter. Don't tell me if you don't want to. Matter of no'mportance me. Manners is somethigg, though. I'm no king or belted earl. I'm not even a countess, but when I get in elevator I always lift my hat if ladies presen'. Always slif mat nelevator fladies pres'n'. If ladies pres'n', invari'ble rule lif tat. Manners, offis-officer—very much neglected, specially in New York. New York is mos till-mannered place in universe—in whole universe, mos' ill-man' place N'York. D'you deny it? No! Well-ell, since you don't deny it, I'll prove it to you.

"To-night, for instance, I go into res'rant, famous hostillery, and I go into res'rant, an' there I meet—who suppose? Don't try suppose. You'd never guess. Nicest girl in world, thass all.

"Nicest girl in worl', I used to think. I don't say what I think now. I trust I'm gen'eman enough not to criticize lady to stranger, or even mention her name. Manners, misteroffersoff, manners!

"But of all the dam' doutrageous, treasherous fiends in human form, that girl is it. I'm not criticizin' her, but it's heartbreaking to me to find girl I trust with m'life is regular Judascariot. O'course you don't know whole story, and wild horses wouldn't drag out of me her name or what she did. Wild horses wouldn't. Her name was April Shummerlin, and what do you suppose she did? Don't ask me, because gemlenan's conf'ence is inviola-invoali-inbolavolilable. Protect woman all hazar's is my motto.

"And this 's'ow 'twas. Well, I go in there and—I may have had have had drink or two—few innocen' li'l' ornzh-bloshms—no harm in ornzh-bloshms—man take all ornzh-bloshms in Unine Stashe and never feel it, couldn't he? O'course he could. I did.

"Why, when I went nat res'rant I was sober zam now. Fact is, old man, I can't seem get drunk. Seem zabsloot limposs—imposs—impolysyllable for me to get drunk. And I've had sush a day of it to-day! If you only knew! I almos' wanted get drunk. But could I? I ask you, could I? Not a damn could I!

"All ornzh-bloshms world couldn't drown my powers of rishinashiotion—good word, huh? ver' nice word. I learned it college. You ever been college? Course not, you big Mick. You didn't muss mich, though. Whass college teash a feller? Powers of rashinoshition. Thass all. But what use is it to be able rashinosh when you're only roshinasher in town?

"Can April Shumerln use powers reason? No! abslooshy no! Why, when I walked in there, sober as old hoot-owl, that girl—don't ask me name—remember, wild horses!—don't forget wild horses—

"Well, anyway, Mish Shumlinen tried reform me! Can you beat it? Tried reform me! Can you beat it? Said

I'd had enough! Enough! Oh dear! there isn't liquor enough in world to drown my poor sorrows, and she says a few ornzh-blossoms drowned me. O woman, ooman!

"Well, jus' then along came baby-carriage full o' booze. Must have been baby-carriage old god Backache himself was pushed round in. Well, when I saw that—oh, officer! But would you believe it? Eleven million waiters made a trensh raid on me! I counted 'em—level mellion witters! I set my fists goin' like old propeller my old airboat. I smashed waiters till I got so tired—oh, so tired! I suppose I mus' 'a' pile dup sisseven million wäi'rs. Then I was so tired—gets awful monot'nous pilin' up wai'ers—so I just walked out. I just contempshously shook the feet off my dust and walk tout.

"Manners is somethigg, after all, officer. My name's Tasster, and no Tasster ever stayed in res'rant where eleven malion wetters tried push 'mout."

He yawned vastly, and decided that he would take a little well-earned repose on the curb, but Twomey lugged him along, combining the technic of arresting a thug with the technic of soothing a petulant child.

By the time they reached the Deucalion fatigue and drowsiness were beginning to suffocate Bob's soul. The vertical posture was intolerable; he was in a horizontal humor.

Officer Twomey suggested that he might go up and borrow a cigar off Bob before he went home. Bob was delighted at the suggestion, but he was drifting far away. The elevator-boy liked Bob, and smiled indulgently as he took the officer up and opened Bob's door with a pass-key.

At the sight of his bed Bob went over like a felled cedar, with his limbs in four directions. Twomey took off his shoes and his clothes with much rolling and hunching, straightened him out, covered him up, opened a window and let in a gale of air already vibrant with the reveille of dawn.

He paused a moment to look across the innumerable roofs still smothered in night and the last of sleep, and at the vast metropolis of the sky with its countless street-lamps and its unfathomable communities.

He looked to the east, where the dark was a little less dark. It came to him that the sun was high over France now, and shining on the fields where the American dead were sown.

In one of those cities of crosses, one cross was slanting above the earth-blanketed form of his boy.

That boy had been wild when sober and ugly drunk, and Twomey had learned patience with him from the lad's mother. He was solemnly glad that his son and he had been friends, and had wrung hands before the boy went for a soldier but did not die for Ireland after all.

The big policeman felt old and fatherly, and his heart swelled in his great breast as he smiled at Bob where the boy lay in a brief, ignoble death, a hero, for all the babbling, brawling insanity of his escapade.

It came to Twomey as he walked home that Bob had probably sunk to this muddy degradation as an escape from some unbearable misfortune to get away from killing thoughts —somewhat as the soldiers had dug into the slimy trenches for refuge from the dreadful things that filled the air.

And that was so.

Bob's folly was always pushing him off some dock or other into water far over his head. But somebody always jumped in after him.

Total strangers would respond to his need as quickly as old friends who knew him. There was a kind of magnetism about him that seemed to be as irresistible as it was inexplicable. Such a man is more mystic than any of these lofty heroes of occult gifts and superb spiritual endowments.

Even the waiters who rushed Bob out of the restaurant learned to like him during the brief and lively passage to the door. The policeman he reviled took him, not to the cell he had earned, but to the bed he had not deserved.

Far, far better than a talent for taking care of oneself is a genius for getting oneself taken care of.

April, however, was finished with Bob. She had fallen out of love with that aviator, and she had no parachute. It was an awful bump from clouds to clods.

No martyr in the flames, no good woman stripped before a jeering multitude, could have felt more intense torment and confusion than April during the period between Bob's idiotic entrance and his contemptible exit. She never knew how she got out of the place alive. Her face was streaks of red and white, like a barber-pole.

So April was no longer in love with Bob. He had humiliated and degraded her beyond endurance. And she would never care for him again—never! Nothing handsome that he could ever do could atone for what he had done.

Bob, however, was not one of those who atone for a wrong with a right; he effaced the first wrong by committing a worse one. Furthermore, Bob was not one of those who win people by doing nice things for them; he won them by presenting them with opportunities to do magnanimous things for him. And magnanimous deeds feel about as good as anything this side of Paradise.

But April was definitely and finally and everlastingly done with Bob. At last she was saved from letting him wreck her life as well as his own. Something at least to the good has been accomplished thus far.

Of course, if April should see Bob pushed off a dock, or walking off a dock into terribly deep water—well, she would not fall in love. She would jump in.

But it would have to be terribly deep water.

## CHAPTER III

AMONG all the sleepless sleepers in New York, none suffered more than Professor Zebulon Taxter. His body was determined to go to sleep, and his brain was afraid to let it.

No saint had ever acted with a purer altruism and no thief ever suffered purer remorse. Zeb was as dismayed at what he had done as Bob was. The success of his insane act was bewildering. He could not imagine how he had got down those stairs without breaking his neck. He credited the Lord with upholding him and placing that old hack exactly at that spot, just as He had set the whale just right for Jonah to drop into.

Ordinarily, a cab-driver will pause to ask for a specific address. But Hob Doat had had few fares recently, and he accepted Bronx Park as destination enough. He thanked Heaven for sending him even an old negro for passenger, as perhaps the whale thanked the Lord even for an ejected prophet.

By the time Zeb had got his breath he craned his neck to see through the dirty little mica porthole in the back of the cab. He could see no one pursuing, and he settled back with a sigh of joy into the sweet chariot that had swung low, comin' for to carry him home.

His brain began to fidget as to a place of concealment. He dared not return to his Thirty-third Street haunt, because the police would undoubtedly go there at once. Had he not distributed business-cards all over town? The one he gave Miss Summerlin had brought him back into the Taxter fold. He was out of it now as the blackest of sheep. He had done been and gone and run off again. But some day he would go and come home again, too.

The main thing for the present was to keep from getting arrested—to lose himself so that he could stay lost till he was ready to unlose himself.

During his years in New York Zeb had made many friends. He was a church member in good standing. He belonged to several lodges, benevolent associations, and clubs; he was what is known as a "joiner." He had been a distinguished member of a committee to welcome home colored soldiers.

He was a fairly important man in that world within a world, the negro community. He was not rich or lettered, like some of the real-estate men, landlords, editors, and merchants of his race. He had not made a fortune by selling a chemical guaranteed to take the kink out of the hair—usually also taking the hair out of the conk. But he was a sage, venerated for his years, his solemnity, and the big words he used.

Up-town there, there were "black belts" where dealers in what is called "colored real estate" established shady oases in the white desert. These oases were growing all the time, as more and more of the negroes came up from the South to escape lynching bees and gain opportunities. Many of the black soldiers who had been drafted out of the cotton-fields and sent to Europe (where they saw black troops treated as equals by foreign men and women) came back to settle in New York.

The race problem of the South, at which the North had wondered with incredulous contempt, was shifting rapidly to the North, and bringing with it its old concomitants of horror and slaughter. The labor unions were finding the negro workman a hard problem to digest: he was willing and able to carry a heavy load, and proud to take a wage that organized white labor despised.

The race riots in Chicago, Omaha, and Washington had their real origin in the intractable despotic mood that labor had acquired after a generation of coddling by moralists, poets, and sentimentalists, who all too easily persuaded working-men that the use of the hands in toil is a pitiful slavery, and that a small wage is a proof not of a lack of energy or ability in the earner, but of a brutal robbery by his employer.

This sentiment reached its climax in 1919, and the down-trodden laborer became so ruthless a shirker, and so destructive a downtreader, that public opinion sickened of him. The labor oligarchy found itself stranded on the rocks and

confounded with all sorts of Socialists, Bolshevists, and Anarchists.

The negro problem seemed to be one of the next national agonies. It was stirring and simmering like a geyser in its depths, preparing for an ebullition that should carry it to no one knew what a shot in the air before it should fall back and subside, as the most scalding geysers do—for a while.

Zeb, however, had no friends among the restive negroes. His kind were the meek and lowly, who accepted their dark skins as a cross that Heaven had given them to bear, and would reward them for wearing peacefully.

He bethought him at last of a humble couple in Harlem. Mrs. Rideout was a chocolate mound, her husband a huge licorice stick. She went out by the day to wash in people's homes, and he went out by the day to drive an ash-cart. They had formerly lived near Zeb when he dwelt on San Juan Hill, and had met in a church where Sister Chloe was a loud exhorter and Brother Eph a sonorous Amenster.

When they moved North they had invited Zeb to call upon them, but he had never paid them a visit. Now he ransacked the old rubbish-container of his head and dug the address out of his memory before the cab had gone a mile.

He tapped on the front glass and, leaning out at the open door, told the driver the address, explaining:

"I've change' my mine abote Bronnix Pahk."

"Aw-awl right!" snapped the driver, hoping that his horse had not heard the distance he had yet to go.

When Zeb finally decabbed at the door of the Rideouts' apartment-house, paid his fare, and took a certain pride in letting himself be robbed a little, he looked up at the sign: "The San Miguel. Respectable Colored Families."

It pleased certain negroes to pretend that they were of Cuban extraction.

Zeb found that Mrs. Rideout was away at work, but Eph had finished his day, and he made Professor Taxter welcome.

Zeb expounded the elaborate lie he had developed and memorized on the way up, and accounted for his precious vacuum-cleaner:

"I been vacurum-cleanin' up-taown, and I remembered you-all's invitin' me to drap in. So yere I yam."

Mr. Rideout received him royally. The wages of team-

sters had soared, and laundresses were receiving better pay than college professors. When Mrs. Rideout arrived, Zeb pretended that he could not stay to supper, just for the luxury of being coaxed. She coaxed him.

Mrs. Rideout complained that owing to the dearth of servants she had to do her own housework. But she was one of those cooks that made Southern cooking famous, and Zeb and Eph sat in the kitchen and fed their eyes and nostrils on the preparations for the feast. After supper Zeb continued to sit and talk and talk, and by and by he heard the words he was waiting for.

There was a spare room, and he was urged to spend the night. Very artfully he mingled his protests that he could not think of it and his confession that it would save him a long journey down- and a long journey up-town again the next morning; and at length permitted himself to be coerced.

When his host and hostess finally decided to "retiah" he went to his room with a feeling of shame at forcing them to shelter the criminal he was. He got into bed and lay with his arm around the precious container of the stolen funds. Then he lifted it into the bed and covered it.

He spent a miserable night; his furious dreams were not nightmares, but night-bloodhounds chasing him from torment to torment. He had a vast amount of dream lore in his superstitious head, and the appearance of the simplest objects in his visions had terrifying significances that he shivered over while he waked.

His imagination wore itself out at dawn, and he fell into such a profound sleep that when his host peeked in he had not the heart to disturb him.

Even the noise and the savor of breakfast did not penetrate to his senses. His perfect hostess left a breakfast to keep warm for him on the gas-stove, and therewith a little note:

"Hep yoresef and turn of the gass and cal agan sune"

It was well on in the forenoon when Zeb woke and found himself alone in a strange bed. He thought it was a jail room at first, but gradually remembered.

He rose, washed, dressed, fed handsomely on the breakfast, and sat down to think. He fancied that all of the police in New York were on his trail. He peered out of the

window to see if they had him treed. No one was in sight, unless he were disguised as a loiterer.

Zeb supposed that the morning papers were full of him, and ventured at last to look out into the hall. Seeing a small negro girl going down the stairs, he bribed her to fetch him a morning paper.

The head-lines at least did not contain him. He read every line of the paper, including the advertisements, understanding little except the fact that he was not mentioned, nor his master nor the ten thousand dollars.

He felt a trifle disappointed, insulted, somehow, in spite of his relief. His reverence for the all-seeing eye of the newspapers received a shock.

And now he was alone indeed—not even worth a line. Unless, perhaps, the police were keeping the affair secret in order to give him a false sense of security.

But he could never have a sense of security while he was alone and cursed with all that money. It belonged to his master, as he himself did, and his supreme desire was to get back to the family with it.

The childish old ape was as blue as a dog that has run away from home and regretted it. He was working round slowly but surely to the inevitable conclusion that he would rather go back and take his whipping than stay away any longer.

He was afraid, though, to try to get back to Bob, for fear the police would seize him and drag him off to a cell, with never a chance to explain.

And if he reached Master Bob he would probably be refused a hearing. He had already been told that he was fired. That was impossible, of course, but how could he make sure of persuading Bob to give him another chance?

He thought of sending the money back first, as a proof of his loyalty. But how could he send it? By hand? Whom could he trust? By mail? Or express? Would it ever get there?

The more he floundered tne more he wound himself up in rope.

Who would untie him and intercede for him?

In the storm-clouds about him only one face shone out—the pretty, the angelic countenance of Miss April, whom he

had instantly accepted as worthy of being the wife of his master.

The first day he saw her, didn't she help him out of the elevator and lend her white hand to the task of untangling the vacuum hose? She was his one hope.

But he who imagined so vigorously had not imagined the present state of April's feelings after her encounter with Bob at the restaurant.

## CHAPTER IV

KATE and Joe debated a long while over schemes for taking away with them more cash than they had.

Their procedure is interesting, perhaps, as a specimen of one way that New York gets a bad name.

Kate and Joe, two wicked persons from the far South, met a man who had come on from the far West; they played upon his evil motives, robbing him of money he had stolen in the West. Later they caught a vicious man from the far East in his own trap, and robbed him.

Not one of the persons concerned was born in New York or belonged there, but to New York was attributed the whole mischief.

Joe relied on the pistol that Bob had returned to him, and he was for sticking up the cashier of a dance-hall or a movie-palace. Kate objected that it was dangerous to work in a crowd, where some blind fool might, from excess of courage or of fear, jump and cling, or shoot and hit, and wreck the high enterprise.

Kate preferred something more quiet, subtle, congenial, in a scene remote from the police.

Joe deferred to her womanly intuition, and they set out on the hunt for such game as might cross their path. They kept near, but just off, the "Broadway of Harlem," One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, wide and bright and cheap as tinsel. Joe dropped back as they approached a certain restaurant, "The La Joy Café," a bower of shoddy gauds.

Kate went in alone and found a seat by herself, where she ordered a drink. This advertised her as a reckless person; her face and garb advertised her other attractions.

Because "The La Joy" was obscure and yet hilarious, Kate had chosen it for the "location" of the movie scenario she had improvised from well-worn sure-fire material. Because "The La Joy" was obscure and yet hilarious, a

certain man from the West had chosen it as a safe place to come up for air.

"Honest Jack" Gabe was born and bred in the cattle country, where the best of good men come from, as we are assured by countless writers and by critics of wicked metropolitan fiction. He had none of the disadvantages of life in the vile cities, but grew up under God's own sky, close to nature. Hence he was rugged, fearless, brawny, and yet gentle as a woman except when aroused; in fact, he was just like all Westerners.

And so in time he became the cashier of a bank in the small and well-ventilated town with the playful title of Cattleina. There was a good deal of whisky, harlotry, murder, and crooked gambling in Cattleina, after dark; but the town had no vices, being in the West.

Honest Jack, unfortunately, lost too much at cards, and fell into the habit of taking the money of the depositors—with the best intentions of putting it back, of course. He was as honest as the day is long. Unfortunately, his nights were still longer, and by and by he was in so deep that he went on through.

He took all the cash and negotiable securities the bank had, and then he took the eastbound express. His photograph and description, and the offer of a reward, followed him to New York. The expectation of this cramped his style as a Lothario, and reduced him to sore straits for amusement. He spent a good deal of his time and most of his money in pool-rooms, but he had been frightened even from this most stupid known form of sport by a series of raids. He could not afford to get arrested even for carrying a pistol, for he would not be let off with a fine. He would be shipped back to Cattleina, where the depositors would probably save the state the expense of boarding him at the penitentiary by cordially depositing him from the limb of a tree.

Honest Jack was just about convinced that honesty is the best policy. He was blue enough to risk arrest for the sake of a kind word from some human being, preferably a "gal"—as a young woman is affectionately called in the West.

On this night he slipped into "The La Joy," whose merry scene Kate had chosen to adorn. The sight of her solitary

beauty inflamed him. He caught her eye again and again, and finally she granted his ocular appeal, and indicated a willingness to receive him as a guest by moving over a little on the long imitation-leather wall-seat which gave the place an imitation Parisian look.

Honest Jack strode over to Kate, carrying his honest Stetson—he had not yet sunk so low as to disgrace his head with one of the fashionable hats. He and Kate were immediately as good friends as if they were members of the same lodge.

Honest Jack was, like all Westerners, slow of speech, metaphorical of language, and big of heart, and Kate won his sympathy by confessing that she was a desperate woman. Her husband had deserted her a week before—had run off to Canada with Another. Kate moaned that she had stayed in her lonely home till she could stand it no longer. Honest Jack could understand her perfectly. She just had to have a little human companionship, she said; and she didn't care what happened.

Honest Jack tried to console her in his rough-diamond way. Champagne was trebly a tribute now, since its price had trebled and more, so Jack ordered a bottle of champagne wine, and, like all Westerners, said, "Here's how!"

When he paid his check he took from the inside pocket of his honest store-clothes vest a fat bundle of folded bills. He peeled off a yellow boy, and put the wad back carefully. It was all that remained of the depositors' money.

Kate felt that it was going to be a pleasant and profitable evening—nearly as sweet as the imitation champagne. Honest Jack was too noble to count the short change the waiter brought him. He swept it into his pants pocket. He came from the country where waiters do not expect to be insulted by tips.

Kate sighed and murmured a shy regret at having to leave so nice a gempman and go back to that awful lonely flat. And Jack, being one of nature's gempmen, said he couldn't see how it was absolutely necessary for her to go back alone. He was sort of lonesome his own self, and how about poolin' them two lonesomenesses and makin' it a jackpot?

Kate was ever so grateful, and coyly consented. She folded up the big bill of fare, with its menu mimeographed in

purple ink. She said she wanted it as a souvenir of one who was certain'y a perfect gempman, if God ever made one.

Jack called a taxicab, and Kate gave the driver an address across the Park. In the gloom Honest Jack forgot his timidity, and when Kate snuggled in his arms and wept he comforted her as only a stalwart Westerner can comfort a little woman who has been maltreated by one of nature's ignoblemen.

After Kate had sobbed awhile fear began to chill her. She began to tell of the cruelty and treachery of her husband. He was wanted for killing a man. She had not known this, of course, till after she had married him in her innocence. She had stuck by him, though, and been a good wife to him. But how had he rewarded her? With suspicion and brutality! If she ever looked at a man, her husband wanted to kill him. He had taken a shot at one poor fellow, too, who had merely seen her home once when she felt faint on a street-car. But those jealous ones are the worst kind! Wouldn't you just know that kind of a man would run off with another woman? Wasn't that the world? Shoot at his wife if a man was just polite to her, but if he saw anybody he liked, away he goes! Leastways, she reckoned he'd gone. She was told so by a certain party. Of course, she didn't know for sure.

Maybe the police had got him! They were always after him. They took him once, but he got away, and you should have seen him when he came back unexpected and caught her just talkin' to a gas-meter man, and—if the man hadn't had his book in his hand and been writin' in it, he'd never have read another meter. He'd have been killed, for her husband always had a gun, somehow, and he didn't care who he shot.

By this time Honest Jack was in a gentle sweat, not altogether due to the balmy zephyrs. He was in a state of perfect psychological preparation for what followed.

The cab stopped at the door of one of those super-solitary apartments where the hall door is opened by push-button from tenants aloft warned by push-button below.

Honest Jack stepped out with an anxious look up and down the street, helped Kate down, and paid the taxi-driver, who taxidrove away.

Kate paused to look for her key, and cautiously peered into the hallway. She fell back with a gasp and a whisper:

"My God! my husband's come home! He's waitin' for me. Looks like he's got a—yes, it's a gun! Run quick! Don't let him see you or he'll— Oh, run! run!"

And Honest Jack ran, as any honest man would do in like circumstances—as much for the lady's sake as his own—perhaps a little more for his own.

His long legs ran him in good stead, until the sight of a policeman in silhouette under a lamp-post checked him. Jack was a little afraider of a policeman than of a shooting husband.

He walked past the policeman nonchalantly, without breathing, till he had turned the next corner. There he paused for breath. As he ran, he had kept his hand on his waistcoat to keep the bundle of money from falling out. Something impelled him to make doubly sure that he had it, and he reached for it stealthily. It did not feel natural. He moved closer to the next lamp-post. His money was the carefully folded bill of fare he had seen the woman take for a souvenir. His thousand dollars was a purple scrawl of things to eat: "steamed clams, boiled live lobster, shrimps!"

While Kate had wept on his manly bosom she had completely unmanned him. Honest Jack ran round the corner and all the way back. If that policeman had got in his way, Honest Jack would have trampled him under. When he reached the lonely apartment-house, of course Kate and her husband were not there. Honest Jack played scales on the push-button keyboard till the door was jiggled open and all the tenants were out in the halls and the janitor up from the basement.

Of course, no such persons as Kate and her husband had ever lived there. And Honest Jack went his uncertain way, cursing the wickedness of the modern Babylon.

The depositors' money, or what was left of it, was now safe in the hands of Joe and Kate. They had stood for a few precious seconds, watching Honest Jack as he made his first outbound dash—or (as Joe worded it) "took it on the Dan O'Leary."

Then they had fled together to a taxicab, and so home.

Their laughter nearly split their sides as they split the wad of the poor boob from "God's country."

## CHAPTER V

THE next morning found Joe and Kate still laughing the inextinguishable laughter of successful thieves.

But sweet as stolen fruit may be, it is not always sufficient. To revert to the text at the beginning of this story: nobody ever had just enough money.

Kate sighed: "We can't leave this man's town with only this one little orn'ry thousand dolla's. Dough is too loose round here to leave it lay without grabbin' off a mite mo' on the way out."

Joe answered solemnly, using the very words reported to have been employed later by the Mayoress of a large American city in answer to a polite observation by the visiting sovereign from Belgium:

"Queen, you said a mouthful."

The problem for Kate and Joe was just what money to try for next. They debated a long while, each suggesting some wild project for the other to reject. At last Kate, who could never forget the chagrin of losing the Taxter necklace, bethought her, as so often, of diamonds—shiners.

"Shinas!" said Kate. "I got to take away some shinas!"

All forms of jewelry had gone skyward in price with the rest of human necessities. The war had shut down the diamond-mines and restricted the output for years. This, of course, made them only the more desirable.

Gems were quite the rage among fashionable thieves. There were the usual quiet atrocities committed by wives upon their husbands, and sweethearts upon their lovers, in the form of theft by persuasion, coercion, and shame, with a resultant diversion of funds from the proper usages.

There were also gigantic burglaries in homes and hotels. Nearly every paper advertised some woman as having lost far more mineral wealth than she had been suspected of having. It is bitter to acquire fame by losing wealth.

To lift a forty-thousand-dollar lavallière is a crime of the first water, and Kate would have felt that murder was a reasonable price to pay for the opportunity.

But jewel thefts usually impose leisure for long reconnaissance, and time was what Joe and Kate could least afford.

The big shops were sure to be well guarded, and the lesser ones apt to be cautious. Joe and Kate went forth for a breath of air and a study of the terrain.

On upper Third Avenue they came upon a pawnshop window with a number of sparklers displayed among the curious clutter of things that people hock.

They lingered and walked past; then decided to make the venture. They discussed the strategy in technical terms with swift understanding, and Joe set out to look for a taxicab, while Kate went back to the pawnshop with the grim exultance of a playwright approaching a theater where his own fate is to be settled.

The pawnbroker was alone, and he looked the Shylock as he stood quaint and hopeful among the trophies of embarrassment that filled his window, his cases, and his safe.

The law had cut down his usury, and the various branches of the Provident Loan Society showed mercy to the temporary or permanent poor. So this ambitious pawnbroker looked for his real opportunities in making covert deals with thieves.

He acted as a fence when he dared, and his was a peculiarly dishonest dishonesty, since even his burglar clients could not trust him; for if the police came snooping round, Mr. Nosswitz was quick to expose all his wares and protest his innocence.

If any of the missing articles were identified, he promptly told the police as much as he could about the crook who had fooled his trusting disposition. He protested too much, his compulsory daily reports were plainly doctored, and the police despised him, as they do all their stool-pigeons, but they found him useful as a parasite that preyed on parasites.

Into the shop of this thief from thieves Kate entered shyly, trying to "look like a million dollars." She was wise enough to know her limitations and not pretend too far. Her dialect at least was natural:

"I saw a ring in yo' window that looked right good to me, unless you have betta."

Mr. Nosswitz hastened to lift it out and lay it before her for examination. She was not satisfied.

"Ma husband, you see, has just made a killin' in the oil business. We're from Texas, you know. He's simply foolish rich, and he wants to dress me up like a hoss and buggy.

"I've been raound to Tiffany's and Marcuses and those places, but, heavens alive, they want a wagon-load of money for a diamond you can't see with a microscope!"

"It's a robbery they make," Mr. Nosswitz agreed, with a shrug extending to his finger-tips. He was almost persuaded already that Kate was on the level. And he suspected everybody who entered his store of being there to sting him one way or another. He suspected everybody on earth of trying to sting him. He had left Russia under the conviction that he was persecuted, though he had made it almost impossible not to persecute him. He had suspected America from the moment he saw the Statue of Liberty. She looked to him like a big bronze clock ornament already turning green. He sneered at her.

He had not been in America a day before he had a list of grievances as long as his beard. Later, he had sacrificed his chin-banner, and he shaved now and then, but new grievances grew out every day like hair. His grievances were as much his own excreta as his whiskers, and it would have been as difficult to stop their growth. It was his discouragement that was indiscourageable.

Kate attacked him from a new angle by admitting that she was an out-of-towner, a new-rich, and therefore gullible. Mr. Nosswitz grew so enthusiastic over the prospect of cheating her that he almost forgot to suspect her. She led him on by taking out a large amount of money and making as if to pay for some trinket, only to change her mind after every ring, brooch, or bracelet that he displayed:

"That's too cheap. While ma husband has got all this money, I want to buy something wuth whahl. There's no betta investment than diamonds; Liberty Bonds can't touch 'em, do you think so?"

Mr. Nosswitz answered, heartily, "Sure I don't."

Kate's guilelessness, her ambition to spend, and her ignorance of values simply overwhelmed the poor man. He began to bring out everything in the shop that was expensive, and he added to the cost recklessly.

He finally unwrapped a long bar pin of big diamonds in platinum. He had got it from a cherubic bell-boy in a large hotel. Kate admired this immensely, but she hesitated over a choice among so many choices. She explained her delay:

"I'm expectin' ma husband to drop in. He went to get some good cigars, and he's comin' right along."

The moment Kate mentioned an expected man Mr. Nosswitz winced. He did not like to have two people in his shop at once. Before he quite realized what he was doing he had pressed a button under the counter ledge. It made a little noise in the kitchen, like a sleepy rattlesnake's warning.

Mrs. Nosswitz, who was busy in her combined kitchen, drawing-room, dining-room, laundry, nursery, and dormitory, dropped her work and moved forward with a large pistol in her hand.

Just as she reached a well-masked loophole Mr. Joe Yarmy walked in the front door, trying to look like two million dollars.

"Oh, thah you ah, honey," he said to Kate. "Found anything you like yet?"

"There's several nice things, ma dear," said Kate. "What do you think of this lavalleer?"

As Joe drew near, Mr. Nosswitz's heart began to bound like a chained watchdog. He could hear it bellow and feel it plunge.

Joe reached out with his left hand to take the concatenation of jewels that Kate held out for him. With a pretense of great courtesy, Mr. Nosswitz snatched it himself and held it out. Joe was so shocked by the crass behavior that he pushed his right hand into his pocket and brought out the same gun that he had threatened Bob with, only now he got the drop first, and he snapped:

"Put 'em up!"

Mr. Nosswitz's hands went up half-way in a familiar gesture.

"On up!" said Joe.

He was going to add, "Keep 'em up till ma wife gathers up

the stuff and gets outside, and I folla; and don't come to the do', for I'll shoot from the window of the taxi."

That was what he planned to say, and Nosswitz looked an easy victim. His hands were palsied in the air, and it was rather his terror than his wisdom that led him to cry out:

"Mamma! don't shooot yet!"

He was afraid that Mamma would shatter him and a lot of expensive glass besides.

Joe and Kate were petrified by the sharp cry of "Mamma!" and by a harsh voice from some vague place, uttering a profane parody of their own phrase:

"Poot 'em ooop!"

Kate and Joe hoisted their hands in a horror of disgust. Nosswitz swept the gems off the showcase, thrust them into the safe, and slammed the door. Now he felt braver, and he faced the situation like a conqueror instead of a victim.

But Joe still had his gun in one hand. He brought it down now, to the level of Nosswitz's chest, and called out to his invisible menace in a plucky burlesque of her dialect:

"Mamma, if you shoot me, I shoot Papa!"

"Vait vonce, Mamma!" cried Nosswitz. And there was a pause, a general stalemate.

Joe and Kate were too good sports not to respect the swiftness of the pawnbroker's action. Joe was not much afraid of the marksmanship of the concealed woman, but it would make a noise, the street outside was crowded, and the cab-driver was not a confederate, simply a hasty pick-up whom Joe had told to drive to the pawnshop and wait while he went in for a package, and then drive to the 125th Street railroad station in a hurry.

The plan had looked simple in the flare of the diamonds, and far cruder plans had succeeded again and again. But now the jig was up.

Yet Nosswitz felt none too triumphant with Joe's gun at his chest. He would have died for his diamonds, perhaps, and gone to Gehenna with one more grievance. But he was no more eager for the police than Joe was. They would seize the jewelry themselves, no doubt, and he would be as badly off as if he had let the thieves take it. Nosswitz trusted the police a little less than he trusted anybody else.

He felt that it was an excellent time for an armistice.

Even with his hands in air again he gesticulated with the palms inward instead of forward as he grinned nervously.

"Vat's de uset of such a shootink? It's unly to make nuisance vit police. You go on owid kviet und I dun't make no complaint, so averybody is sottisfite."

Joe was reluctant to leave empty-handed and defeated, but the mysterious tone of Mrs. Nosswitz was curdling:

"Move over, lady, vile I shoot dot chendleman!"

Kate moved over to the door, and Joe, with an instinct of comradeship, moved with her. He let her out, pointed his gun at Nosswitz, and said:

"Come on out in the street!"

Nosswitz was suspicious of the invitation, and stood fast long enough for Joe to close the door, slip his gun back into its arm-holster, hasten to the cab, and tell the driver to beat it to the deepot. He looked at his watch to add plausibility to his innocent need of haste.

The cab carried two of the most frenziedly indignant passengers that ever jounced among the pillars of the elevated. Kate and Joe emitted oaths in a stream.

One thing was certain: their outraged pride would not permit them to leave New York without effacing this stain. They devoted themselves to getting somebody's diamonds.

"There's that Taxta necklace," Kate moaned.

Joe nodded, "We've just gotta get it."

"If we go to the Chair for it," Kate added. Joe renodded.

They got out at the railroad station, paid the cabby, took a local train to 138th Street, got out, and returned by streetcar to Bob's realm.

## CHAPTER VI

BOB TAXTER was spared that "cold gray dawn of the morning after" of which Mr. George Ade's Sultan of Sulu sang. But oh, the hot-red afternoon!

The policeman angel who had put him to bed had done well to evade a fight with him, for that old fellow with the drunken name, Publilius Syrus, said the sober truth when he said, "The absent alone he harms who quarrels with the drunk."

Robert Taxter the Best had been submerged by the incoming tide, and the worst of all Robert Taxters had ridden the waves. But now the tide was on the ebb and the best Robert was emerging slowly, and drying out as slowly as a soaked sponge left on the rocks.

For hours there was no Taxter at home at all, either good or bad—nobody that heard, saw, spoke, stirred, or thought. A sort of night-watchman of the soul breathed in a sleep below sleep. The telephone bell found him deaf; the light from the window found him blind. Acute financial and spiritual crises sat outside the door of his soulless house like so many bottles of milk or bags of buns.

The night elevator-boy (who had helped the policeman in with the piece of dead luggage that contained the residue or germ of Bob) had used a pass-key and had neglected to report the affair when he went off duty in the morning. Consequently, when Bob's distracted mother, having heard nothing from him all night, called up his hotel the next morning, the telephone-girl rang his room, but, getting no response, consulted the desk-man, who glanced at Bob's letter-box and saw his key there, also a few letters (such letters as every guests at a hotel receives).

So the desk-man told the telephone-girl:

"He's out."

And she told the mother. Mrs. Taxter left a message:

"Please leave word in his box to call me up the moment he comes in."

The telephone-girl promised glibly. And forgot with equal glibness.

Half an hour later Mrs. Taxter called again, in vain—and at intervals throughout the morning. Once or twice the telephone-girl remembered to put the message in the box. But the key there was always accepted as proof that Bob was out.

The chambermaid had tried the door, unlocked it, and taken a peek inside. Seeing Bob in bed, she had closed and locked the door. But she had not reported to the office the fact that one of the guests was sleeping late. She kept an impatient watch on the door, but Bob did not go out.

The first feelings of a new-born soul will probably never be recorded. They are probably chiefly concerned with a bad taste in the mouth calling for warm milk.

The first feelings of a newly sobered soul are familiar: they begin similarly, but it is not warm milk that is called for. Ice-water! The soul returning to its ravaged nest wails for ice-water—inside and out.

Eventually Bob came back to his vacant dwelling, slowly, tormentedly, twitching at this muscle and that like a lineman repairing the wires after a storm. It would have been something to marvel at if it had not happened so often.

The only thing that keeps everyday things from being incredible is their recurrence. The only difference between a miracle and a custom is that the miracle happens only once and the custom, which may be far harder to explain, happens all the time.

Before David Warfield became the master of tears he played a Polish Jew in the old Casino reviews. He could not understand what a miracle was. Who can? But then another actor tried to explain it by illustration in some such words as these:

"Suppose a man fell out of a third-story window and lighted safely without breaking a bone, what would that be?"

"A excident."

"Yes, it might be; but if the same thing happened a second time?"

"Anudder excident, yet."

"Well, all right! But if he did it a third time—"

"Dot vould be a hebbit."

So any man might fall out of the window of sobriety once, by accident; and a second time, perhaps; but to jump out of the window a third time! We call it a habit, but it is the strangest of miracles.

This was not the first time Bob Taxter had jumped off the roof. He had always been bruised throughout in body and soul, and always was as much amazed as he was remorse-ridden and earnest in resolutions. He had always been as sick as if his stomach were trying to crawl up his esophagus and turn itself inside out. Every nerve was an incandescent wire, every sense ablaze and indignant. Every motion was repentant, humbled, despondent, ashamed to such a degree that nobody except himself could be pitiless toward him.

Yet at the first derangement of his plans he ran back to the roof and launched himself wildly into the alcoholic ether.

This time, as always, he swung his clanging head with the dolor of a throbbing bell in a high spire as he registered his usual solemn adjuration, "Nevermore!"

And this was indeed his last spree—in this book. After its finish this record will have to abandon him to his future (with grave misgivings).

This day had trouble enough of its own, and a redundancy. The Prohibition law renders a full description of Bob's miseries already prehistoric—as unimportant to the innocent future as an account of the indigestions of a tyrannosaurus or the emotions of a dodo. A year or so from now no doubt the Americans will wonder at drunkenness as much as at witch-burning, and with as good reason.

There was a man who came through the horrors of the *Titanic's* collision with the iceberg, and all he could say of it was, "Oh, it was terrible!"

Let that brief epitaph suffice for the hours of travail that resulted in the again-borning of Robert Taxter.

When he came at last into a state of renaissance where he could think of something besides his nausea and his gratitude for the invention of ice-water and ice poultices; when he came next out of the dark valley of repentance and groveling desire for death by suicide or by well-earned legal process, he grew acutely aware of a number of things.

His world was so full of such numbers of things that he was surely as sorely unhappy as kings. He had an adumbration of his infamous misconduct in the restaurant before the eyes of his best beloved and various others. This gave him a period of mental nausea and violent spiritual retching. His scrimmage with the waiters which his vinous self had celebrated as a sort of Miltonian battle with fiends seemed now a degrading exhibition of idiocy in which he had not only lowered himself to a contest with menials, but had gone on down to defeat.

He resolved that he would never show his Cain-branded face in that restaurant again. Indeed, he cut all of Broadway off his map. The entire district through which he had ranged he erased as a future *terra interdicta*. He himself was *interdictus aqua et igni*, especially in the combination known as fire-water.

As for April, of course he would never dare appear before her again.

Then he thought of his mother. He realized that he had promised to telephone her the moment he knew his plans. As if he had not butchered her poor heart enough the day before, he had starved it to death for news. He could imagine all too well how she must have been frenzied with anxieties.

The one thing he could do was to telephone her that he was alive and unmarried still, but that he would not be the former for long. A decent suicide would be his one atonement.

His mother would suffer bitterly at first, but she would get over it gradually and he would become a somber memory, a tender thought. That would be better than going on from disgrace to disgrace and continually piercing her soul with terrors and regrets.

Next he understood that he was a pauper. His ten thousand dollars was gone, his extra money was gone, and he had nothing but debts.

No priest ever devised penances more fierce than a nature like Bob's conceives and administers to its own soul in the first hours after an outbreak like his. Such self-vilification and self-castigation would seem to be almost adequate as a price for absolution.

But automatically, being a big, healthy brute, Bob's body

threw off the poisonous acids and his mind condensed the black fogs and cleared his sky.

Like a very modern Prodigal, at last he lifted himself from his husks and said, "I will arise and telephone my mother."

When the miraculous wire thrilled with her cry of rapture at hearing his voice he felt glad that he had deferred suicide. He felt that his suicide was adjourned *sine die.*

He could tell by her laughter that she was weeping. He could almost hear her tears patter; tears sparkled in his own handsome eyes as he realized how precious his mother and he were to each other.

She begged him to come to her at once from wherever he was. She had, as it were, fallen on his neck while yet a great way off. Her welcome was so fervent that Bob laughed even when he confessed:

"I can't. I'm busted higher than a kite. I haven't got a cent, mamma!" That old boyhood word had slipped into place on account of his childish poverty. He heard his mother gurgle with pride. It brought her back by a kind of witchery to twenty-five again.

"I've got lots of money," she giggled. "And I'll come right down and take you out of pawn, my blessed angel!"

"Well, hurry up," he shouted, "for I'm hungry."

"I'm on my way this minute, honey. But—oh, one thing. You're not married, are you?"

"No! And I ain't never goin' to be!"

"Oh, glory hallelujah! Good-by!"

How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings—and tidings-over!

## CHAPTER VII

IT occurred to Bob that he had just time enough to get dressed before his mother reached the Deucalion. Next it occurred to him that while he had just time enough, he had just no clothes at all.

His evening clothes were as Officer Twomey had left them. Twomey had felt neither the obligation nor the ability to play valet with the evening clothes of his ward. He had flung them over a chair and left them.

Folding them up would have done them no good.

Bob's brain was trying to make up for lost time. He called for the porter and told him his plight:

"You sent my trunk to the station yesterday?"

"Yah, the Gran' Centerl."

"But I said the Pennsylvania."

"Your coon said the Gran' Centerl."

"My coon! The black thief stole my money and carried off the claim-check and—what can I do?"

"I might get it back for you from the baggage-man up there. I got a record of the number, and I guess maybe—it might take a little money, but—"

Bob answered promptly: "Oh, I'll make it all right with you—as soon as I get it. You get the trunk, no matter what it costs."

Bob had not so much as a quarter for a tip, but a saving cashier was on the way.

The porter nodded and went his way.

Bob put on his bathrobe and decided that the only thing to do was to tell his mother everything. It is one of the rarest and sanest decisions that men arrive at.

His mother dawned at last and brought with her not only funds, but an inexhaustible treasure of sympathy, understanding, and, what he needed most of all, admiration.

To hear her talk, one might have thought that she be-

lieved his spree an act of inspired wisdom and nobility, for when he tried to admit that it was imbecile, criminal, unpardonable, irretrievable, and all that sort of *-le*, *-al*, and *-ile*, she kept crying: "Not at all! I don't wonder! I don't blame you! Who wouldn't, with what you had endured?"—and all that sort of mother-chatter.

She was too wise as well as too fond to attempt any moral rebukes, preachments, or high ideals. She fed him what he was famished for, not what he had already choked himself with.

And so by the time his trunk had really come and he had paid the porter liberally out of his mother's money and he had unpacked a complete outfit of clean and normal clothes and got into them, he had put on a new, fresh mind also. The man inside the underwear was as good a man as ever he was. He had courage, hope, ambition—and he even put on his mind a topper of defiance like a cocked hat.

He was so re-established as the old intractable Bob that when his mother felt reckless enough to say, "And now you've got to go right ova to April and make up with her," Bob went straight up into the air like one of the new helicopters with no preliminary take-off and spiral.

"Not in a thousand years, mother," he said, already back from "mamma!" to "mother." He laughed cynically:

"In the first place, she wouldn't speak to me if I did."

"You're goin' to dew just what youah motha tells you for this once or I won't give you one single solitary cent of money. But I'll tell you what I will do, Mista Robert Taxta! I'll take you right across ma knee this ve'y minute and give you the wust spankin' evva you had in all youah bawn days."

He looked at her sheepishly. She looked as if she meant it. If she tried it, how could he resist her? He simply had to obey. He did it with as little grace as possible.

"All right, I'll obey you, because I've got to. You've been mighty sweet and you've got all the money. But you'll be sorry for this the longest day you live."

"Then I'll be sah'y for it, but I'm goin' threw with it."

"All right. Come along."

Bob mopped his brow. The parable of the Prodigal Son stopped with the banquet. It did not go on to tell what the

neighbors did to the young man the next day or how he made up with the girl he left behind him.

It was enough for the Prodigal's parents that the dead was alive again and the lost found, but that girl surely insisted on knowing just what he did while he was lost and with just whom he wasted his substance with riotous living.

That is where the beauty and the poetry die out and the humdrum prose begins. And April could be counted on to make the humdrum hum.

No one knew this better than Bob Taxter, and he did not want to be the drum for April to play. He was feeling too much like a drum that had been left out in the rain. His skin was too taut around him, and every tap made his head reverberate.

He sank back into his chair and said:

"I'll take the spanking. I'd rather take one from you than what April will give me. I'm in no mood for a row, and I just couldn't put up a fight. I fought all New York last night, and all the liquor in the world, and—well, I'm just about ready to retire on my laurels."

His mother saw that he was really unfit for attack, defense, or negotiations. She gave him further love and courage and devotion, like very milk from her full breast. And then she decided to fight his battle for him once more, as she had done when he was only a tiny codger and ran to her for protection from the big mischief he had started and could not handle.

"I'll tell you what, honey! I'll go there first and make all the explanations and smooth the way. Then you come along a little lata, and—"

Bob shook his head: "Go if you want to, but I'll wait till you telephone that the coast is clear and the war is over."

She smiled and went her way, while he slumped in a chair and leaned across the window-ledge, musing upon the thousands of roofs and the streets, and the people in them, as mysterious as the sky over them.

## CHAPTER VIII

APRIL ordinarily had no more than an academic interest in the morning papers, but after Bob's invasion of the restaurant, her futile effort to rewrite his character, and the grand smash of his exit, she fell asleep in hopeless confusion, only to wake very early and wonder if Bob were in the news.

Springing from her bed like another rhododactyled Heos, and almost as lightly clad, she limped down-stairs with one slipper off and one slipper on, hobbled to the front door, and snatched the morning paper in from the sill, and searched it to see if those dramatic critics, the police, had cast Bob for a prominent rôle.

All the world's a stage, as somebody has said, but we all try to be more than merely players; we try to be managers and dramatists of our own lives and of others', and of life itself. And we run a gantlet of critics before The Critic puts on the mark of failure or success that makes all other critiques vain.

Lo, the poor playwright, who, having agonized through the first performance, rises betimes to find what those matutinal deities, the morning-paper critics, have done to him; and having survived that drum-fire, hopes or fears the barrage of the afternoon papers; and after that the weeklies, the monthlies, the quarterlies, and finally the annual reviews—these last often finding him dead or established, and otherwise immune.

April's search for dramatic notices of Bob was as vain as Zeb's for himself. Unwittingly, they agreed that since the war the front page had been very stupid.

The whole morning long April fretted, refusing to see Walter Reece, or Claudia, or Hugo Clyde, all of whom called up and were put off.

She dabbled at her statuary, and decided that sculpture

SHE DECIDED THAT SCULPTURE WAS NOT FOR HER

was not for her. She would take up tatting and get a parrot and a cat and go old-maiding to her grave, which she hoped was not far off.

She made Pansy call up the Deucalion and inquire for Bob. The report was that he had went out the night before and had not came back as yet. This left the whole, wide world of possibilities wide open.

The afternoon papers might have something. His climax might have been reached too late for the morning editions. She sent Pansy out for the extras, and Pansy fetched them the more eagerly since she wanted to know if Zeb had bust into print. She asked April to search, and the search was equally bootless. Both of their so differently unsatisfactory men-folk were still unknown to fame.

Mrs. Summerlin, to avoid going mad in trio, set Pansy to sifting the last winter's ashes in the hearth once more, in the thought that Bob's money might have blown there.

The word "ashes" reminded April of an old song of love fordone, and she sat at the piano, groping for the accompaniment and the tune of "Ashes of Roses." As she neither played nor sang, the result drove her mother frantic.

Pansy, squat on her knees at the fireplace, catching the words that April mauled, sniffed:

"'Ashes of roses,' humph! They ain't no mo' use than what ashes of greenbacks is."

April groaned: "Poor Bob! I suppose he's fallen in the river, or been run over by a truck, or something. He won't need his poor five thousand; and our money is no good to us, either—two lonely widows."

"Three widdas," Pansy almost sighed. "I done lose ma Zeb again; eitha he's boun' for the Nawth Pole or the jail-house. I'll nevva see him no mo'! Po' ole Zeb!"

Mrs. Summerlin sank to a divan:

"Three wise women stranded on a desert island, with nothin' to spend but a hundad thousan' dolla's, and no place to spend it."

"Betta spen' it buyin' a nice husban' for Miss April. I don't know nothin' awfulla than just women-folks settin' roun'. Sometimes I reckon the Lawd made min to keep the women comp'ny 'stead of th' otha way roun'."

"Oh, Pansy, hush up, for Heaven's sake!"

"Yassum! If I git back to ma dishes, they'll be only me in the kitchen, and I won't be so lonesome."

As she got to her feet, the telephone bell rang and she answered it.

"Is who in? Did you say Miss Summalin or Miz Summalin? Oh! And who's you, please? Oh!" She turned to Mrs. Summerlin:

"It's Mistoo Kellogg. Is you in?"

Mrs. Summerlin started to say, Yes but April said, firmly, but gently, "No, mother, you're not in!"

"But he—"

"No, mother. No, Pansy, she's not in."

Pansy made a face of despair and repeated the message into the wall, only to turn back. "He say, when will you be in?"

"Never!" said April. "Oh, tell him to-morrow. We'll all be dead by then, I hope."

"To-morra, please," said Pansy to the astonished telephone, and hung up. She glared at her unruly wards. "I wisht you chillun would tell yo' own stories. I got enough o' ma own to tell. It's gittin' so I'm ashame' to go to chu'ch any mo'. Whyn't you try goin' to meetin'?"

April broke down. "Oh, if I could only have a good cry!"

Mrs. Summerlin ran to her. "Don't, don't cry, whatever you do. I can't stand that."

Pansy pushed her aside. "Go on away and leave ma baby cry." She gathered April in her arms. "Put on yo' rubbas, honey, and let the delooge come."

April tears would not run at command, but her mother, suddenly realizing the girl's true anguish, fell into a chair and wept bitterly. Pansy stood distraught between the two. But April ran to her mother, knelt by her, and took her white head on her young shoulder and said:

"Poor mamma has all her own troubles and all of mine. It's time I was carrying them both. Don't, mamma! Don't, sweetheart! If you don't stop, I'll die!"

So her mother strangled back her sobs and the two clung together.

It was thus that Mrs. Taxter found them when she arrived as the courier of Bob. Pansy let her in under protest:

"Oh, ma Gord! mo' women!"

But Mrs. Taxter hurried to the two forlorn castaways with the marvelous news:

"Bob! Bob's found! I've found Bobbie! He's all right! Everything is all right!"

April had many questions to ask, but they were not such as could well be put to Bob's mother. All she could say was:

"Where did you find him?"

"In his rooms. He called me up, and I went to see him, and he—he's te'bly sah-y for everything, but he's alive and well and—he isn't ma'ied to that adventuress, and he isn't goin' to ma'y her. I begged him to come with me, but he wouldn't—at least he wouldn't until I told him I'd whip him if he didn't, and then he said he'd come only on condition that you'd forgive him."

Now that April was asked for the forgiveness she had sworn never to grant even in the impossible case of its being asked, she fled to Mrs. Taxter's arms with a wild keen, and, clinging there, wept and wept and wept.

Mrs. Taxter embraced her, but stared down at her in amazement:

"What is she sah-y about now?"

Pansy growled: "Don't you know nothin'? She's so happy she's havin' a celeb'ation." She patted April's turbulent shoulder-blades. "Go on, honey, let the rain po'!"

This, of course, checked it instanter, and April began rubbing her eyes and cheeks with shamefaced vigor.

"The only trouble," Mrs. Taxter said, "is that those awful Yahmys got away with the Taxta necklace, and that unspeakable nigro, Zeb, got away with every cent of Bob's inhe'itance. Of co'se, I don't care who got what, so long as ma boy is free, but Bob is crushed. You'll see him, though, won't you? Even if he is penniless and penitent—oh, so penitent!"

April ran to the telephone, but hesitated before it in embarrassment, as if Bob himself were inside it, as his voice would be the moment after she got his number.

"You call him," she said to Mrs. Taxter, shyly, and Mrs. Taxter caressed her as she passed.

## CHAPTER IX

GETTING telephone-girls in those post-war days was so difficult that getting telephone numbers came to be a test of nerves and endurance. The luxury of lifting a piece of rubber from a hook and commanding immediately the attention of a person miles away had come to be so much a matter of course that seconds became minutes and minutes hours. To wait seven minutes for a connection with some one whom it would take half an hour to reach by taxicab was considered an almost intolerable hardship. People grew so frantic that the Board of Health actually threatened to intervene in defense of the public sanity.

Mrs. Taxter had not been in New York long enough to go mad over a few minutes of leisure spent in leaning against the wall and waiting for a miracle. She was perusing April's beauty with an affectionate smile, almost purring with contentment.

In the meantime Pansy heard the kitchen bell ring and went to answer it.

No one else heard her gasp as Zeb pushed through the door with his vacuum-cleaner container in his left arm.

He held his right arm before him to receive the blow he expected Pansy to deal him. A little of the rapture in her heart escaped in her first cry, "Zeb!" but she throttled the humiliating confession of affection and became the shrew she affected to be:

"So you come sneakin' back, did you?"

"Yassum," Zeb mumbled.

"Is the police ain't find you yet?"

"No'm."

"Well, what you want roun' yere, you shif'less scoun'rel; you dog what kills his own masta's own chickens? Couldn't you find nobody else's money to steal 'cept hisn? Where-all you been at, anyhow?"

"Oh, I been ridin' round in a old horse and hack I found, and I been hidin' out up in a Hundad and Thutty-thud Street."

"And now you come down yere lookin' to me to look afta you?"

"No'm! I'm come for to see Miss April."

"You think I'm goin' to let you see her so's you can steal our-all's money, tew?"

"I 'ain't steal nobody's nothin'. Ef you don't tell her, I'll walk you down. Nobody can't keep me from seein' my Miss April, and you betta don't try."

Pansy stood wondering at his new manner of autocracy. It was as becoming to Zeb as a new suit, and it did not consist with her theory that he was guilty of a treason.

By this time, having secured Bob's promise to come at once, Mrs. Taxter was saying:

"Bob would be all right if he could only find that villain of a darky."

"What on earth could have-made Zeb do such a thing?" April wondered. "He seemed such a nice old man, and he wanted to live with Bob forever."

"But Bob had discharged him before he stole the money. I suppose he thought he would make off with it since he couldn't expect any more wages."

April was in trouble again. "Bob discharged Zeb? Why?"

"Because he prevented him from getting dressed; stuffed all his clothes in a trunk and sent them away so Bob couldn't get married."

"Bob discharged Zeb for making him miss the wedding!" April moaned. "That means that Bob wanted to marry that woman! If it hadn't been for Zeb, he'd have been her husband now."

"No, no, honey; not at all," Mrs. Taxter protested, yet she was disconcerted by this unconsidered aspect of the case.

"What else could it mean?" April demanded.

As Mrs. Taxter wrung her wits for an explanation, dreading that Bob would walk into a war in spite of all her diplomacy, Pansy appeared in the doorway.

"Miss April, they's a ole nigga ote yere what says he wants to see you. It's Zeb."

"Zeb isn't here!" Mrs. Taxter gasped. "Notify the police at once!"

Pansy nodded to Mrs. Taxter, but spoke to April:

"He's pow'ful anxious to get a word with you fust, Miss April."

April was feeling rather pleasantly prejudiced toward Zeb since he had interfered in the marriage arrangements, but Mrs. Taxter did the talking:

"I'll see him, if only for the pleasure of telling him he ought to be whipped. And you run out and get the police, Pansy."

"Yassum," said Pansy, but she did not run. She stood by to see what happened after she motioned Zeb to appear.

He lumbered in, always toting his vacuum-cleaner container. He was very ingratiating in manner, but evidently terrified:

"Howdy, Miz Summalin; howdy, Miss April; howdy, howdy— Oh, and Miss Lee! Miss Lee, I been lookin' for you. I got a very important c-communicatium for you. It's about yo' boy, Masta Bob. You better take holt of dat limb o' Satan and straighten him out. Does you know— o' course when I say 'does you know' I knows you don't know, but does you know dat young gemman ordered me out of his rooms?"

"Out of his rooms! Didn't he tell you he had discharged you?"

"Yassum, thass what he done tol' me. Thass what I wanter tell you to tell him not to. He don't seem to realize he cain't fire me."

"What? He can't—you say he can't!"

"No'm, he cannot. I belonged to his gran'pappy's place befo' he was bawn, or his pappy, either. As fur as dat goes, I used to dandle his daddy on ma knee befo' you was bawn, Miss Lee. Old Masta Bob uster say to young Masta Bob's daddy, 'You do what Zeb tells you or I'll larrup you maseff.' But these young colts comes up Nawth and gits Nawtheren notions, an'—"

Mrs. Taxter broke in furiously, her amazement lowering her to argument:

"You're the one that's been up Nawth too long. If your old Masta Bob had you down there, he'd have had you whipped."

Zeb glugged with laughter, like a bottle upside down.

"Oh, I don't mind dat none, Miss Lee. Whippin' never hurt a nigga much, I reckon. It was paht of de pie. You could always whip a nigga, but you couldn't fire a nigga. 'Case why: they wasn't no place to fire him to. I wisht you'd explain that to yo' boy, and tell him he's got to take me back."

"Did any one ever hear of such insolence?" Mrs. Taxter cried.

"Yassum. Masta Bob suttainly was purty insolence." Zeb laughed with a lofty benignity. "And one mo' thing. You tell him he ought to call me Uncle Zeb and show his respect for me. I left the South when I was too young to be called Uncle, but I'm hankerin' afta it now. I got a right to my title now, same's anybody."

"'Uncle'? He'll uncle you! Why, you talk like the Nawthernest darky I ever heard of."

"Call me anythin' yo' tongue can lay hands on, Miss Lee, but hahd wuds can't make no Nawtherna out o' me. Masta Bob tried to make a Texas Southerna out o' me, but he didn't have no success. I'm Virginia, I am!"

"Look at him! He's laughing!" Mrs. Taxter fumed. "Mary, order him out. No, wait for the police!"

"Police!" Zeb gasped. "What de police gotta do wit' a family matta?"

"Family! Perhaps that five thousand dolla's you stole was a family matter?"

"Me? I nevva stole no five thousand dolla's, Miss Lee, askin' yo' pahdon, please, for cont'adictin' you."

"You deny that you stole five thousand dollars from my son? Why don't the police come?"

"No'm. I nevva stole a one cent from him. I took ten thousand dolla's."

Mrs. Taxter was almost suffocated by this astonishment. April and Mrs. Summerlin also jumped at the word "ten."

"Did you take both five-thousands?" April cried.

"Yes, Missy. But us Taxtas don't steal from Taxtas. No'm. I got it all right yere, and I'm mighty good and tired of it. I 'ain't had much sleep sence I had that money on me."

"So you're the ghost that took the first five thousand?"

Zeb laughed. "Yassum, I'm a ghos'. And I ain't no happier 'n what ghostses usurally is. I been mighty much troubled about that young masta I done took on. He's been sech a power of trouble, Miss Lee, I wonda you evva raised him. What we-all goin' do wit' him from now on?"

This tone was naturally not one to be encouraged. Even Mrs. Summerlin rebuked it:

"You ungrateful wretch! To give us all such a scare. And Mista Bob took you in and was kind to you, and you treated him—simply outrageously."

"You'd better not let him see you," Mrs. Taxter added. "He'll never forgive you for humiliating him so. I don't suppose he'll have you arrested now. But you'd better give me his money and get away before he comes here and finds you."

Zeb was dazed at this inconceivable event. "You mean he wouldn't want me aroun' no mo'?"

"Of course not. You disobeyed every order he gave you. You stole money from him twice."

"I had ma reasons, Miss Lee; and good ones they was."

"But your reasons aren't his. You must know that. It's too bad you lost such a nice chance, but Mista Bob would never trust you again."

This appalling determination to misunderstand his devotion shattered Zeb's faith in humanity, even in the Taxters. He bowed to the bludgeon, set down the container, and muttered:

"Well, I'll git out the money, then I'll git out maseff. I reckon I'm a gone coon."

And then Pansy exploded. She went off like a heap of fireworks ignited unexpectedly:

"Hol' on heah, Zeb. I reckon hit's ma time to bus' loose. Miss Lee, you come mighty near not bein' a Taxta, and young Masta Bob wouldn't 'a' been one, neither—he wouldn't 'a' been nothin' at all ef it hadn't been for Zeb."

"What's set you off, Pansy? Hush now!" Mrs. Summerlin commanded, but all in vain.

"When the gemman you ma'ied, Miss Lee, was a li'l' six-yeah-old boy, one day they was a mad bloodhoun' come tearin' down the road wit' de soapsuds streelin' off his mouf, and evvabody went runnin' and yellin', 'Mad dog! mad dog!'

"I seen 'em, and I run as fas' as de bes' of 'em. But when de road was clear, dere's young Masta Bob's pappy playin' in de road and payin' no attention.

"That ole mad dog come snappin' and slaverin' right fur him, and evvabody freeze up and stand gapin', waitin'.

"But one young buck nigga he run like he's a wolfhoun' and he jump for that mad dog, and him and it roll in de dus' togetha. You can't tell who's bitin' who. On'y when the fight is ova that mad dog's a daid dog. He layin' on he back with his tongue lollin' out. The man is on the ground, too, kivered wit' foam and blood. I seen the blood! The boy you ma'ied aftawards wasn't even scratched, but the nigga had his arm 'mos' tore off him. Does you know how they cured that nigga? They brand him with a red-hot iron. That's what they done. And thah's the brand!"

She seized Zeb by the sleeve, shoved the cuff high, and bared a long, livid scar puckering the black skin.

Zeb had almost forgotten the ancient deed. He felt sheepish now and pulled his cuff down decently, grumbling: "Ah, that's all ova and done, Pansy. Nevva mine abote that."

Pansy would not be cheated of her ecstasy of rage:

"Ova and done, is it! Well, I reckon not. Miss Lee, you listen to me. When Zeb save yo' li'l' husban' from the bloodhoun' they brand him wit' a hot iron, but they take keer of him. Now, though, when he save yo' son from bein' ca'ied off by them mad dogs from Texas, you goin' brand him again and turn him off! You is, is you? Well, all I got to say is white folks ain't what they useter was. Come on, Zeb, I got a hundad and fo' dolla's and fo'ty-fo' cents, and when they turn you off they turn me off. Come on!"

The three white women stood aghast. Their hearts were full of amazement, shame, gratitude, and love for the two old blacks. If Zeb and Pansy had been whites, or dogs, or horses, they would have been embraced, kissed, and caressed.

But such a demonstration toward Zeb was impossible. He relieved them from their embarrassment of awe and of shackled affection by turning to Pansy with an adoration disguised as mockery:

"When yo' mammy named you 'Pansy,' Pansy, she was suttainly a po' prophick. A name would suit you betta would be Catnip—or Peruvian Bark. But you suit me. It's

abote time we was gettin' ma'ied. We been engaged goin' on fifty years. Come on, honey, let's go to the pahson. I'll resume my vacurum-cleanin', and I can find a lot of washin' for you to take in."

He took her old burnt-liver-colored hand in his, but Pansy was tumbling to earth now from her first flight in high altitudes, and she wrenched her hand loose.

"Ah, go on, you ole fool!"

Zeb fell back, completely exiled now. But Pansy said:

"You kin come with me and git ma old trunk down them stairs."

This was all the acceptance Zeb needed. So long as the spirit was there, he did not cavil at the language. He fairly hopped up the stairway, forgetting his master's money in the joy of being a bridegroom at last.

As Pansy moved grimly after him, the three women stared at her through tears of deep and tender homage. They longed for words befitting her sable majesty.

Just then the door-bell rang. Her weary feet turned toward the door of themselves, but April, with a smiling irony, said:

"I thought you had resigned."

This almost broke Pansy's back. She nodded, sighed, "Yassum," and went clumping up the stairs, muttering, "I'll just git ma bonnet and shawl."

April was so absorbed in tormenting Pansy that she forgot whom to expect when she opened the door.

"Bob!" she gasped, as if he were the last man she could imagine.

He stood there like a truant who has been whipped by all the world and has come back to his teacher for the worst whipping of all.

"How do you do, April!" he faltered. "How do you do, Mrs. Summerlin! Hello, mother!"

"Come in, won't you?" said April, forcing him to step forward as she closed the door behind him.

He was so miserable that he would have been glad to learn that the Yarmys were after him, as they were.

Joe had called up the Deucalion, only to be given the universal reply that Mr. Taxter had not returned.

Kate and Joe could think of nothing else to do but go to

lie in wait for him. They were foolish with rage and gambling with destiny. In their fear of leaving Bob the satisfaction of having made fools of them, they were ready to make bigger fools of themselves.

They paced up and down the street until they saw Bob's mother get out of a taxi and go in. Expecting her to come out, they waited and waited, walked and walked.

At length she reappeared, got into a taxicab, and drove away. They had no idea whither she went, as they had not been near enough to hear the address she gave the driver.

They argued that she had not found Bob at home and had given up waiting. They continued their sentry duty until their last patience was spent. Joe resolved to go in and insist upon some information from the desk-clerk if he had to flash a gun on him.

He left Kate at the corner and marched on the hotel. Just as he put his foot on the steps Bob appeared at the door, whistled to a passing cab, ran out to the street, and got in.

Joe heard him give the familiar address of April's apartment-house. He hurried back to Kate, and found her ready for a show-down with fate. They were not of those who fear their fate too much or whose deserts are small; they did not fear to put it to the touch and win or lose it all.

## CHAPTER X

WHILE Kate and Joe drew near, like Dunsany's jade-green gods advancing on their victims, April was wasting precious moments at her old sport of teasing Bob.

"Too bad you lost your heart and your head, your bride and your boodle, all in one busy day!"

Bob was very solemn in his rejoinder:

"I didn't lose my heart yesterday. I broke it, but I've still got it. It's about all I have got."

"I supposed it was the loss of your bride that drove you to drink."

"No, that's the one consolation I have."

"But you discharged Zeb for making you miss the wedding."

"It wasn't for that; it was for disobeying and making such a fool of me—even a bigger fool than I made of myself."

"Poor old devoted man, trying to be a slave again."

"'Poor,' eh? He's got five thousand dollars of mine somewhere. I'd believe he took the first five thousand, too, but he was up-stairs at the time it disappeared. And did you know that he practically accused you of taking it?"

"Me! He accused me?"

"Well, he didn't exactly accuse you, but he said it was probably taken by somebody who loved me and wanted to save me from giving it to the Yarmys."

"Speaking of them," said April, "where do you suppose they are?"

"I don't know and I don't want to. It was a short engagement, but lively while it lasted."

"Has it been broken?"

"Well, not formally. But the bride has decamped."

"Are you sure that she's not waiting for you somewhere?"

"O Lord, don't suggest it!" And Bob mopped a sudden moisture from his brow.

"You don't want to see your fiancée again?"

"I should say not! considering the peculiar way she became my fiancée."

April's curiosity flared. "It would be mighty interesting to know just how the romance started."

"I can't explain just yet—some day, when—well, some day."

"And while you're waiting for that, what are you going to do?"

"There's nothing much for me to do except to go back into the aviation service. They'll let me in, I reckon, as a lieutenant again—not much money nowadays; in fact, it's so little that the army officers can't live on it. They're resigning in droves, and they'll be glad to get me back. An aviator gets twenty-five per cent. more than the other services."

Mrs. Taxter spoke up:

"Bob honey, if you have any notions about my letting you go back into those awful clouds again, you can lay them aside right now. You've ridden in your last airship, son."

"But I haven't any money, not a cent. I don't know anything else but air."

April had to say, "You know a lot about oil, don't you?"

"Ah, forget it, can't you?" Bob grumbled, wincing. Then he spoke more tenderly as he took April by the arm and led her to a corner over by the modeling-stand. "I deserved to lose the money, but always remember one thing, April: the only reason I fooled with that oil gamble was that I wanted to make more money than you had so that I could ask you to marry me. I felt like a pauper with only ten thousand dollars and you with twenty-five thousand in your own name. So I dreamed of being a Coal-oil Johnny in a few weeks and dazzling you. I didn't know any other way to multiply my money by ten. And now I've multiplied it by zero. But I did love you, and I always shall."

April felt strange tremors in her heart and a tremor of tears at her eyelids. If Bob had not persisted in using the past tense, she might have told him how bitterly sweetly she loved him still. But until he asked her to be engaged to him again she could hardly confess.

She stood by the statue she had made of him. It was

pretty well battered, but the wings she had broken from the shoulders were still lying on the modeling-stand. She picked them up and thrust their wire armatures into the shoulder-blades of the statue. But the wings would not stick. Wings simply would not stick to Bob's shoulders.

Still he saw the intention, and he was heartened to ask, not for her love, but for that poor thing, forgiveness, and in a dreadfully far future.

"Do you suppose the time will ever come when you can forgive me?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," she smiled. Then, casting her eyes up, she caught a glimpse of Zeb in the shadow of the upper hall, staring at Bob with the woeful eyes of a kicked-out hound that lingers and mourns. So she put in a plea for him.

"The Lord's Prayer says, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.' Have you forgiven Zeb yet? Don't you think you ought to take him back before you ask anybody to take you back?"

Bob, who had no suspicion that Zeb had returned and converted the women to his cause, was bewildered by the suggestion.

"Take him back? If I could find him, I'd take him back with a club! But he'll never come back, because he knows I haven't got any more money to steal. I couldn't even pay his wages if he were the honestest darky that ever lived."

"Well, he's all of that," said April, relenting before the pathos of Bob's humiliation. "The fact is, Bob, that Zeb came in awhile ago and brought back all your money—the whole ten thousand dollars!"

This was too incredible to accept on the first telling, and on the repetition it was as shocking as the blast of light that shined on Saul and knocked him off his horse.

Bob sat down to it. And he was like a child at a second coming of Santa Claus with all his lost and broken toys restored. He had his ten thousand lost prodigal dollars home for a glorious reunion.

And then, as he realized what anguishes he had endured from that benevolent robbery, he grew furious with wrath. The mother whose boy has run away will adore him and pray for him till he returns, and then how she will go for him!

Of all the wraths, there are none more bitter than those aroused by the waste of precious sufferings.

Now as never before Bob blamed Zeb for making a fool of him—a tragical, farcical fool—a child whose toys have been hidden from him for a while lest he break them.

Bob gnashed his teeth and demanded to know where the black villain was hiding now. But first he wanted to see the beautiful face of his money again.

April refused him this treat. "Unless you promise to forgive Zeb and take him back I won't tell you where the money is." For one thing, she did not know.

Bob mutinied at this.

"Take back an old wretch that disobeys every command I give? sends off all the clothes he doesn't ruin, and makes a fool of me—and then laughs! Take back a tyrant like that?"

Mrs. Taxter tried to smooth his smarts.

"Now, Bob honey, your father used to tell me abote Zeb's father. He was such a tyrant they called him the Czar!"

Bob protested: "Well, why did they free the negroes? So that the whites could become their slaves instead?"

Mrs. Summerlin smiled and pleaded: "It's worth being a slave to be loved, Bob. The only good servant is the tyrant. I get so vexed at Pansy I want to slap her; but she bosses me for my good, not for her pleasure. Devotion is a mighty rare thing, Bob; it can't be bought."

April laid her warm hand on Bob's and spoke in her warmest tone, "Come on, Bob, take the old fellow back."

Her wheedling tone was irresistible. Bob grumbled, "Well—if he will consent to obey me, and be respectful, and do what he's told hereafter, and never—"

April lifted her head and her voice: "Will you, Zeb? I know you're listening."

"Why, Miss April, I 'ain't hud a wud!" Zeb called down from above. Bob looked up at him with a murderous glare.

April beckoned Zeb to descend, but he shook his head.

"Oh, I'm liable to come down, ain't I, and have ma last few teef knocked down ma froat?"

Bob moved toward the stairway with menace in his prayer: "Come on down, Zeb. Come along on down."

"No, Masta—or Mista Taxta, I don't come down; and if you come up, I go higher. Me and Pansy is done with you-uns."

Bob gave him up. "I can't kneel to the old brute, can I?"

April whispered, "Call him Uncle."

Bob tried once more: "Come on, Zeb. I won't hurt you."

"Nossa!"

"Uncle Zeb."

Zeb, hardly believing his ears, leaned over the balcony rail. "What dat lass t'ing you call me?"

"Uncle Zeb."

"Say it ag'in, so's Pansy kin hear it!"

"Uncle Zeb."

Zeb turned to Pansy. There was molasses in his voice: "Did you hear him? Did you hear dat 'Uncle' word? I'll just have to take dat young rascal back, looks like." He went down the stairs with the circumstance of a dog that has been whipped and is coming forward to be reconciled. "Well, I looked atter yo' grandpappy, and I suppose I hatter look atter you."

Bob had to laugh. "You worthless old scoundrel!"

"Oh, dem musical sounds!" Zeb guffawed, so confident now that he made bold to say, as he clumped down the steps: "And, Miss April, when you decide you want to marry Masta Bob, just let me know. O' course, Masta Bob has a way o' bein' late to weddin's—he plumb missed one entirely yistaday, but if you'm to be de bride, I'll guarantee we'll be dah; we'll be dah!"

Bob threw a book at him. Zeb laughed as if this were a caress: "You young folks needs us old haids. Why, do you know, Miz Taxta, what trick them Yarmys played on our boy? The old badger game! Yassum, the same old trick—only Masta Bob put a new twist on it. He offer to marry de woman! Yassum!"

"So that was how she tricked you!" April cried, aloud. "She played on your chivalry!"

Bob could not reply, but Zeb had no scruples. "Yassum, his shiftlary get him into so much trouble I couldn't hardly git him out. You-all will be needin' me a long while yet."

And now, just as the air was clearing and filling with an

incense of contentment, the door-bell rang. April answered it again, and Joe and Kate Yarmy rushed in past her.

Joe, seeing Bob, snarled: "There you are, you sneakin' welsher! I've got you dead to rights at last. Put 'em up!" He emphasized the words with a pistol. And Bob put 'em up.

# Book VI
# LOVE COMES IN

## CHAPTER I

THIS cheap and dime-novelish tableau was the veriest realism in 1919–20.

The gun-play of the detective drama and of the movie West had grown so frequent in the big cities of America just then that nobody knew when his or her turn would come.

People in restaurants, clubs, homes, street-cars, were being lined up and robbed with the tritest sensationalism. A little later two burglars would stab a man and beat a screaming woman senseless in a great hotel at Forty-second Street and Broadway, climb down the outside wall of the hotel in full daylight till the shot of a policeman in the street drove them in at a window; and then they would slide down the cable of an elevator to the basement, there, most amazing fact of all, to be caught.

There was something expectably convincing to Bob about the incursion of Joe with the ready pistol. Only, this time Bob had no automatic .45 for repartee.

The muzzle at his navel gave him a queasy sensation of its own, but this was aggravated by other miseries.

Here was Kate again, perhaps with another marriage proposal. Bang! went his romance with April again. Bang! went his ten thousand dollars again.

His spree had left him ill prepared for such a rending strain as this. The stomach is the guardian of courage, and if that is gone who can be brave? Bob's stomach was a hopeless invalid to-day.

The women screamed, of course, till Joe waved his pistol like the nozzle of a hose and growled:

"Shut up, or I'll shut you up!"

Joe had not seen Zeb as he darted into the room. His hatred was all for Bob.

"You played a dirty trick on us, but you can't get away with it."

Bob was not exactly afraid, but he was disgusted at the

prospect of dying so ingloriously. He felt exactly as he did when the Germans humiliated him in his last air-battle. He spoke as a sort of epitaph.

"I didn't mean to play any trick on you."

"Oh no! O' course not!" Joe drawled, with no particular brilliance of phrase. "You didn't try to double-cross us with the necklace, didja? You didn't give Kate an empty box, didja? Oh no! My God! tryin' to work the old box trick on us! Whatcha think we are, a pair of Reubs?"

Bob's surprise was complete. "Why, you've got the necklace, haven't you?"

"Nah, we haven't you! And you know it damned well. And you're comin' across with it or—"

Bob shrugged his shoulders wearily: "I reckon you'll have to shoot. I haven't seen it since I gave it to you."

Kate broke in: "And you said you loved me! I was braggin' to Joe about how hon'able you were. And you tried to buy him off after you disgraced me. And you didn't even pay what you offered."

"I didn't mean to disgrace you, Miss Yarmy," Bob sighed. "If Zeb hadn't stolen my clothes I'd have gone to the church. And if he hadn't run off with my money, I'd have paid you that. I'll pay you now if you will accept it as a—a—"

"How you goin' to pay it when the coon got away with it?" Joe demanded. Bob was simple enough to say:

"He came back."

Zeb had been motioning him so violently not to mention this that Joe followed Bob's glance and caught sight of Zeb behind a column that upheld the balcony.

Joe smiled, a long-toothed, wolfish smile. "Oh, you came back, didja, you old smoke?"

"Yassa," said Zeb, uncomfortably.

Joe took a good gloat and inhaled the savor of his triumph before he said to Bob:

"Well, seein' the nigga's heah with the money, suppose you fork it over—with the necklace—and then we'll be on our way."

He put out his left hand, but Bob had to admit:

"Zeb hasn't given me the money yet."

Joe turned to Zeb. "Then slip it to me, coon. Spit it out in papa's hand."

"Nossa!" said Zeb, with a sudden palsy. It was his resolution, not his terror, that shook him. He was set upon dying rather than surrender the Taxter treasure.

He was like a man with the lockjaw, but it was a case of locksoul. Joe was jolted by his instant realization of the imbecile obstinacy that confronted him. He had known old ladies and servant-girls to fight armed burglars to death rather than give up a pittance. This type is one of the hazards of Joe's calling. He tried to shake Zeb with ferocity.

"Hand it ova, nigga, or, by God, I'll blow a hole through yo' black hide big enough to hold a fence-post."

"Nossossa!" Zeb chattered.

Bob cried to him: "Zeb! Give him the money, I tell you."

"No, thank y', Masta Bob-ob."

"Zeb, I command you! I don't want you hurt."

Zeb wreathed a kind of dying smile: "Oh, don't fret yo'seff, Masta Bob. I reckon Mistoo Yahmy ain't goin' to set himseff in no 'leckrick chair jest for the fun of killin' a ole coon that 'ain't got long to live, anyhow."

This was Joe's own thought. It had kept his finger off the trigger all this while. He was in a throe of despair at the picture of perishing for so tawdry a crime. He drew the color line there. He realized that he was himself at bay now, for Bob would jump him the instant he fired at Zeb. And Bob could whip him. A very merciful man might almost have felt sorry for poor Joe. He could neither go forward nor retreat, nor yet stand pat.

This confusion and the sight of Zeb as stolid as one of those iron negroes that used to be made for hitching-posts drove Joe to a frenzy. "I'll help maself," he snarled, believing the money to be in Zeb's pocket.

He advanced on Zeb and began to search him. Zeb chuckled.

"Don't forgit, I's ticklish."

Joe slapped him across the face.

Zeb laughed.

Bob started to spring. He could not endure to have his Zeb struck by another man.

Joe swung his revolver that way.

Bob paused a second.

Zeb flung himself on Joe, clutching at his right arm and fairly smothering him with uncouth, sprawling, bearlike struggle.

Bob was in the battle on the instant. He clamped Joe's wrist, set his thumb-nail in the tender back of Joe's right hand and bent the hand upward as he pried Joe's fingers, one by one, from the grip of the pistol.

Joe howled with pain and rage. That wolf-cry brought Kate in. She leaped on Bob's shoulders like a catamount and tried to throttle him. He did not want to fight her, and he could only writhe and breathe hard.

And now April shot back into the cave-woman period. Her muscles had fought motor-car wheels and runaway horses, but never a fellow-human. They seemed to rejoice in their first battle.

With a swift, grim efficiency she thrust her arm under Kate's chin, dragging her head up chokingly, set one knee in Kate's back and wrenched her loose, spun her round, and flung her sidelong to the floor, knelt on her right arm, and twisted the other the wrong way up behind her back.

April had read so many jiu-jitsu articles and seen so many pictures that she was astounded to find how easy it was.

It was simply fascinating. She realized vaguely how much women lost when the Amazons became non-combatants. Kate and Joe both cursed and wept while Bob and April worked in silence.

Bob soon had Joe's pistol in his own left hand. Then he forgot his chivalry long enough to collect the revenge he owed Joe for striking Zeb. Before he realized the indelicacy of it he had hauled off and slugged Joe's submaxillary region with such a sledge that he knocked Joe clean out of his body. Joe's soul skyrocketed into that mysterious bourn where the birds tweet and the stars explode and whence the traveler usually returns after ten or more seconds.

Joe's tenantless body went limply through the air, sliddered along the floor, and brought up against the weather-boarding with a flop—in much the same manner as this ill-bred history has probably been flung by any truly well-bred reader who may have endured it thus far.

The lamentable, the appallingly low and brutish scene came to an end with Bob forgetting his own atrocity in his

amazement at the sight of his beautiful April engaged in twisting yowls out of the beautiful Kate.

Bob ran to April and tried to lift her from the floor, but she shook him off, gasping: "Let me alone! If I let this wildcat up, she'll scratch all our eyes out. Get me a piece of rope, can't you?"

Bob stood wabbling, not knowing what to do, while Mrs. Summerlin ran looking for a cable and finding nothing but bits of knotted twine.

Mrs. Taxter had tried to reach Bob to help him in his fight with Joe, but her heart had given way and she had fainted.

It was a pretty sight for a respectable drawing-room when Pansy appeared! She stared incredulous. At the first glimpse of the hated Yarmys she had slipped along the wall and out into the kitchen and thence to the freight-elevator, where she had ordered the boy to fetch all the police in the world on the run.

She flung up her hands in stupefaction now as April, disgusted at Bob, got to her feet, jerked Kate to hers, and hustled her to a shallow coat-closet.

"Open that!" she commanded.

Pansy alone could obey. The amazing April whirled Kate in, slammed the door, locked it, leaned against it, and for the first time had time to be amazed at herself.

She was panting so ferociously and her heart was thrumming such a trill on her ribs that the whole room danced.

Bob saw his mother now, knelt, and lifted her to a divan and pleaded with her not to die. Pansy answered his prayer by taking hold of Mrs. Taxter's beautiful little boots and pulling them up to the arm of the divan, letting her beautiful head slip down to a lower level.

Zeb sat at ease on Joe Yarmy's abdomen and waited for him to resume.

The quiet studio was like the end of a spiritual avalanche. A sudden landslide had brought all these souls heels over head and every which way to the bottom of the cliff of civilization.

They were still rubbing the bruises of their dignity and murmuring to themselves, "Where am I?" and, "Who am I?" when a policeman began to whack on the door.

Pansy let him in. He was not unused to such shindies in the tenements where family debates passed the legal boundaries, but he was dazed to find such a spectacle on such a stage.

"Some rough-house!" he mumbled. He put up his pistol sheepishly, drew his trusty note-book, and said to Bob, "Name and address."

Bob stared at him as emptily as if he had neither.

## CHAPTER II

THE officer motioned Zeb from his prey and recognized Joe Yarmy at once, though he called him by another name. The alarm had gone out for Joe and Kate when they failed to appear at the train they had promised to take the day before, and every policeman was on the alert for them.

When April remembered Kate and let her out she was hardly recognizable. She had just breathed up the last of the air left in the pockets of the coats in the closet.

But she was so glad of a lungful and the promise of a regular supply that she did not much care where she got it.

Joe's soul returned slowly and took up its various tools again like a factory after a strike. He, too, was delighted to find himself once more on the dear old earth, and he did not refuse the aid of the policeman in clambering to his feet.

Bob was saved from painful explanations by the glib Zeb's brief words:

"Mistoo Ossifer, these yere Yahmies is plain crooks what bust in yere to stick up the place. They knowed they was a lot of money and joolery yere, and they'd 'a' tooken it, too, ef Lootenant Taxta hadn't made one of them air raids like he made in France on them ole Jummans."

This established everything pleasantly and satisfied the policeman as to the credentials of everybody concerned. On Bob's promise to appear and make a complaint, he took out a pair of handcuffs, joined the hands of Joe and Kate in unholy padlock, and marched them off.

Peace settled down upon the Summerlin apartment with an almost crushing restfulness. For a long time everybody was content to loll at ease and just exist—everybody except Zeb and Pansy, who stood respectfully awaiting orders. They were not expected to get tired enough to sit down before white folks.

But Zeb's shivery timbers advised him to slip out into the

kitchen for a chair and a chat with Pansy. Bob put up one heavy finger to check him:

"Oh, Zeb."

"Yassa! Yas, Masta Bob?"

"Mighty good work you did."

"Wonderful!" said April.

"Splendid!" Mrs. Summerlin.

"A real hero!" Mrs. Taxter.

Bob finished the old man by saying, "If I ever said anything unkind to you, I—"

Zeb was afraid that in his unsettled condition his master might apologize. He hastened to save him.

"I didn't year no unkind remahks; nossa!"

Bob smiled, understanding and luxuriating in the profound self-abnegation of his devotee. He felt unworthy of it, but it felt nice to be a god to somebody, and he knew how comfortable it made Zeb to imagine him a god, so he said:

"You're a true Taxter, Zeb—I mean Uncle Zeb; and I'm proud of you."

At this Uncling Zeb's face puckered like a scared pickaninny's and tears flooded over into his wide mouth. He began to laugh aloud to disguise the sobs that shook him:

"O Lawdy, O Lawdy! I been waitin' long for this day."

In the era of slavery negroes who had saved their masters' lives or fortunes were often allowed free. In these distressful days of universal freedom Zeb asked only to be allowed back into the comfort of belonging to somebody.

Down in Georgia there was an old negro about Zeb's age, Bill Yopp by name. He was called "Ten-cent Bill" because for eleven Christmases, including the 1919 festival, he went about collecting dimes to buy gifts for the inmates of the Old Soldiers' Home at Macon—not the old Union soldiers, nor the old black soldiers, but the old Confederate soldiers who had fought to keep him a slave. When Bill was a fifteen-year-old slave he had gone out on a battlefield and brought in his beloved wounded master, Captain Yopp, and nursed him back to life. In 1909 Bill found the Captain in the Old Soldiers' Home, a helpless pauper veteran of eighty-three, and he returned to his devotions as Zeb did.

Let him that is without chain cast the first stone. This freedom-thing—what is it? Who has it? The very defini-

tion of it has an eternal alibi. It is always the next release, for we step from one noose to another, we fling off one livery to disclose another, like the circus clown who takes off suit after suit as his horse gallops round and round the same ring.

Every one of us is born or bred or sold into some form of slavery, whether the master be a man, a woman, a child, a god, a cult, craze, habit, party, sect, theory, or what not. The worst slaves are perhaps those who are slaves of the mania of being free. The wiser ones accept a yoke that is not too tight, and settle into it for a good pull of a good load.

Abraham Lincoln rose from the very nothingness of social prestige to be one of the great men of all time. He freed the slaves and was shot dead for it by a man who cried, "*Sic semper tyrannis!*"!

At the very time Zeb was coming back into servitude as into an old homestead thousands of Americans and immigrants were denouncing America as the land of the capitalist and the home of the slave. From the Russian cruelty, missionaries of chaos were stealing in to tell the American workingmen that their soaring wages were but the pittances of helots. Shiploads of the zealots would soon be deported from the jail of an America that was not good enough for them to the paradises they dreaded.

No, Zeb was not such a fool as he looked. He knew himself, as Socrates advised, and he ignored himself, as Anatole France advised. He had genius and courage, but they were altruistic; they bore the Taxter brand. And now he was home where he longed to be.

Bob and April were slaves of their own tempers and they had nobody who could or would rule them. They were captains of their own souls and their souls were full of mutiny within and storm without. By a pleasant irony the captain of a ship who is everybody's slave, the owner's, the crew's, and the weather's, is treated with respect and called master. A Zeb safe in harbor is treated with pity as a servant. Even Bob felt that he condescended when he spoke from his Olympian misery—very Jovially (the canny Greeks knew enough to represent the boss of their gods as himself a slave of fate). Bob said:

"If there's anything you want, Zeb—up to ten thousand dollars—help yourself and give me the change."

Zeb shook his head. He was in nothing more emancipate than in his freedom from many wants:

"Is on'y one thing I hanker atter, Masta Bob, and that's seein' the Taxta necklace roun' Miss April's neck whah it belongs at."

Bob blushed with such chagrin that he felt almost relieved at having an evasion ready:

"The Taxter necklace! Heaven only knows where that is."

Zeb climbed the golden stairs. "Me and Heaven knows!"

He hobbled to the vacuum-cleaner container and back to the middle of the room. And then he turned the can upside down and emptied a heap of rubbish on the rug. When Pansy smacked him over the ear without hesitation he shook his head and chuckled.

"Don't begin dat, Pansy, befo' we's married."

He stirred the gray dust with his black fingers. Everybody began to sneeze. Bob shouted:

"Stop it, s-s-s-top it-t!"

"Sneezin' is good luck!" Zeb laughed. He picked up a twisted thousand-dollar bill, smacked the dirt from it and passed it across to his astonished master. The other nine followed as gracefully as a procession of somewhat bedraggled Muses.

With due dramatic delay for effect, Zeb lifted out the necklace and held it gleaming in the air while he blew the dust away.

Everybody exclaimed aloud. Bob cried:

"How on earth did that get there!"

Zeb reveled in his occult dignity: "Well, hit would take a heap of explainin'! Main thing is the old Vacurum Savin's Bank don't pay no intrust, but you git back what you put in."

He struggled from his knees to his feet with the grace of a rheumatic camel, and went to April with the necklace.

She quenched the shine of his smile by shaking her head. Bob had not spoken.

Zeb went to Bob eagerly.

Bob felt unable and unworthy to ask April to accept it. He dismally motioned Zeb to his mother, and the heart-shaken Zeb poured the gems into her reluctant hand.

He waited a long moment, understanding only that the

high gods of his world would not deign to crown his work and grant his prayer. Then he slumped out to the kitchen, wagging a doleful head.

Pansy followed him, so grieved that she forgot the pile of rubbish in the center of the main rug.

Bob saw the rubbish of his own life disgracing him and he had no vacuum-cleaner to make it vanish.

## CHAPTER III

"WHAT-ALL is this yere ole world a-comin' tew?" black Zeb asked black Pansy in the kitchen. Pansy had to give it up.

It was one of the first questions ever asked and it is still being given up by everybody who is wise enough to differentiate between "I know" and "I guess." If the Sphinx had asked this riddle of Œdipus he would not have answered her.

[FAIR WARNING: The rest of this chapter is a side-trip that has nothing to do with the journey. It is a long détour along old unimproved roads, down deep gullies, across steep ridges, up into a fog-belt where nothing much can be descried, then back down again. It gets the traveler nowhere in particular, and comes out where it went in.]

No other people has ever cherished the thought of life after death, says Doctor Breasted, so firmly as the Egyptians. In the fifteenth century B.C. they were convinced of resurrection and the priests called upon the dead: "Loose your bandages, throw off the sand from thy face. The tomb is opened for thee."

Men were just as good and just as bad and just as both as now as far back as the record runs. At the very opposite pole of time from us, in the twentieth century B.C., a king of Egypt left this epitaph: "I gave bread to all the hungry. I clothed him who was naked. I satisfied the wolves of the mountain and the fowl of the sky. I never oppressed one in possession of his property. I spoke and told that which was good. Never was there one fearing because of one stronger than he."

A hundred years before that an Egyptian doctor said, "Never did I do anything evil toward any person." Two centuries after him the great explorer Harkhuf says: "Never did I say aught evil to a powerful one against anybody. I desired that it might be well with me in the Great God's presence."

They could be wicked, too, and a king five thousand years ago was praised as "the man who takes women from their husbands whither he wills and when his heart desires."

There were skeptics then, as well; Koheleths and Omar Khayyams, Voltaires and Bob Ingersolls. There were many who regretted that no one came back from the grave to "tell us how they fare."

To-day many eminent men claim to telephone the dead, as many men claimed then to recall them.

Both cynics and believers have always dwelt together in a bond of argument.

Four thousand years ago some complained of the dead, "They are as if they had never been," and advised as the only immortality: "Give bread to him that hath no field. So shalt thou gain a good name for the future forever. . . . There is none that returns again."

A poem was written fifteen hundred years before the Book of Job. It might have been written to-day. It will be written again and again on all the to-morrows,

> Lo, my name is abhorred,
> Lo, more than the odor of fowl
> On the willow-hill full of geese . . .
> To whom do I speak to-day?
> Hearts are thievish,
> Every man seizes his neighbor's goods.
>
> To whom do I speak to-day?
> He of the peaceful face is wretched,
> The good is disregarded in every place . . .
> Death is before me to-day
> Like the odor of lotus flowers,
> Like sitting on the shore of drunkenness.

As late as only 1900 B.C. a priest of Heliopolis was bewailing the fact that he could find nothing new to say. "The fashion of yesterday is like to-day."

Then there was Ipuwer, of the same epoch, who mourned that war destroyed everything. "Blood is everywhere." He compared the land to a potter's wheel that turns round and round. "The owners of robes are in rags; and he who wove not for himself is owner of fine linen. Mirth has perished. It is no longer made. Indeed, all small cattle, their hearts weep."

Yet he foresaw the coming of a better day. Breasted says, "This is, of course, Messianism nearly fifteen hundred years before its appearance among the Hebrews."

Ipuwer foresaw the coming of an ideal King, the sun-god Ra. "He brings cooling to the flame. It is said he is the shepherd of all men. There is no evil in his heart. Where is he to-day? Doth he sleep, perchance?"

In 1920 B.C. the hope and the despair were equally keen in congenial hearts according to their custom.

Against Ipuwer's despondency over his to-day and his high trust in the morrow stood the story of the Eloquent Peasant who was robbed and protested that the authorities "make common cause with the thief," as men protest in America to-day against corrupt judges and criminal police.

He appealed to the King who guarded the poor, he cried for social justice the same words that men still cry four thousand years later.

The *Wisdom of Ptahhotep* holds up the very ideals we struggle to maintain to-day with no more and no less success: "Be not avaricious. Repeat not a word of hearsay. Be not partial. Let thy face be bright. How good it is when a son harkens to his father! If thou art successful establish thy house. Love thy wife in husbandly embrace, fill her body, clothe her back. The recipe for her limbs is ointment. Gladden her heart as long as thou livest."

Some fanatics act to-day as if social justice were an invention of the twentieth century A.D. It was a rickety old machine in the twentieth century B.C.

They had strikes and panics then as now. They had repentance, remorse, pity, and tyranny. They prayed and lied and got drunk. They had decadence and they slipped down the path they had climbed so hardly. They had atheism, polytheism, and monotheism. They had music and art and hymns and indecent fiction, weapons and medicines; they even had castor-oil.

But the land turned round like a potter's wheel.

Along came Koheleth, who made despair beautiful in the Book we call Ecclesiastes; who asked, "What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?" He noted that the wind returneth again according to its circuits;

and the rivers that never fill the sea, to the place from which they come.

"The thing that hath been; it is that which shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done.

"Is there anything whereof it may be said, See this is new? It hath been already of old time."

Yet Ecclesiastes advised mankind to make the most of the beautiful world in which there is a time and a place for everything.

And that seems the wise thing to do without wasting our while in puzzling out answers to the unanswerable conundrums.

While Bob Taxter was fretting because of the vanity of his existence, and wondering why he never did what he wanted to do, Brooks Adams was writing a great preface quoting St. Paul's "For what I would, that do I not; but what I hate that do I. . . . I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

Brooks Adams maintained that what St. Paul called "the law of sin" is the law of the universe, the eternal war which must forever debar the world from equilibrium.

Adams declared that the democracy of America has no more succeeded than the older tyrannies of kings and churches. The Law of the Stronger "is the system, however much we have disguised it and, in short, lied about it, under which we have lived, and under which our ancestors have lived ever since the family was organized, and under which it is probable that we shall continue to live as long as any remnant of civilization shall survive. . . . It has become self-evident that the democrat cannot change himself from a competitive to a non-competitive animal by talking about it, or by pretending to be already or to be about to become other than he is—the victim of infinite conflicting forces."

These were the words of a descendant of one of the founders of our Republic, and his brother's posthumous book, *The Education of Henry Adams*, became a rival of popular fiction in its captivating demonstration of the futility of education. And Henry Adams quoted Clarence King's explanation of the hopeless failure of the world, past and future, as due to two mistakes in its creation: the differentiation of the sexes,

and the inclination of the ecliptic. And we are not likely to correct either error.

We were thinking hard in 1919 after the hard fighting of the years before. We saw that illusions had been disproved once more. The League of Nations failed of its dream not because the men who refused it were beasts of prey or hyenas, as its advocates so bloodthirstily proclaimed, but because they were convinced that this panacea was the same old paper poultice that had failed from time immemorial. It could not reach the seat of the disease which is the law in the members warring against the law of the mind.

It is wiser to say, "I do not know," than to shout out a wrong answer. Those who snap their fingers and offer to tell us what the world is coming to are those who substitute enthusiasm for intelligence.

The important thing is to keep remembering that the world does not change much except in details. Its seasons are cycles. The globe spins in an orbit among orbits. There are always those who cry at noon, "The night is vanquished forever." And those who cry at noon, "It will soon be night and no more noons will come." There are always those who cry in midwinter, "The spring will come again." And those who cry, "There will never be another June." Yet flowers bloom and fade and water melts and freezes and melts again.

It is the shrewdest guess of all to say the world is coming to where it has been before, and where it will not stay long, but where it will come again.

The old merry-go-round swirls us whether we will or no. We may change horses and be no better off, or stay put content. The band plays on. And the tune is, "Be Strong, be Kind, be Just, be Joyous!"

Thomas Burke, writing about his beloved London in 1914, said what few would have disputed when he said that those were petty times and there were no great men about.

Before he could print his words the Great War broke. The nations rose, little and large; the dancers, the muddled oafs, the flappers, the dowagers, went forth into a grandeur of sacrifice and self-forgetfulness never equaled in quantity—though often in quality.

The war ended and the chaos began. Pessimism took up

business at the old stand. Selfishness returned to her throne. Yet it was only the necessities that relapsed. There was no longer such a need for such sacrifice.

The same heroism is always here, awaiting the reveille of the bugle. The men and women are ready. It is only the opportunity, not the majesty, that lacks.

The pessimists cry that love is dead and marriage a mockery because divorces are legal instead of merely customary under other names. All over the world in 1919 the rush for divorces became a stampede. Those who make a profession of horror were duly horrified.

In the very center of the divorce-mill, Chicago, on July 18, 1919, two hundred divorces were granted in one day, all of them to average people.

Yet in the same city, on the evening of Labor Day of the same year, Mrs. William Fitch Tanner was crossing the railroad with her husband and caught her foot between the track and a plank of the walk; she could not wrench it free and an express train flashed along the rails and crushed her to death. But her husband did not seek to save his life by standing aloof. He cried, "I'll stay with you, Mary!" clasped his arms about her, and died in the same instant. And the flagman, John Miller, also the father of three children, fought to save the lovers and accepted the shattering blow of that comet rather than retreat.

What perfecter love has all the poetry of time to reveal? What more did Leonidas do, or the sentinel at Pompeii? We need not be ashamed of our neighbors nor fear comparison with antiquity—or posterity.

The animals share with us the immemorial nobilities and cruelties. The dragon-fly, pendent like a jewel from the hydrangea leaf above my little lake, holds in his tiny claws and fangs a mosquito doomed to suffer all the anguish in its world. And yet that mosquito may have filled some human being with malarial poison, which it got from another human being! An imperial spider on the next bush with her cables spread across a wide realm darts to the caterpillar that swings down from the skyish tree overhead, and in a trice rolls him up into a silk parcel and ends his exploration.

But in the water beneath the little sunfish scoops out of the

gravel a nest like a circus ring to be a shelter and a playground for her children; and she darts forth in opalescent fury to attack the vast black bass that lumbers near or the Cleopatran goldfish that drifts too close in a golden barge.

Everywhere cruelty rivals devotion, slaughter competes with sacrifice; and neither is long in the van. As Prof. E. O. Jordan said at the Congress of Arts and Sciences, "It is almost a biological axiom that progress in one particular entails loss in others." It is dreadful that the supply of what we call evil is never used up, but the supply of what we call good is equally inexhaustible.

It is our costumes and our customs that come and go; ourselves go on forever. For what has been truly changed since the pyramids were built or the arrows of cuneiform shot into the stone?

Here was Bob Taxter, as ordinary a youth as could well be. His like fought mastodons, paced the streets of ancient Thebes, raced through the Academe, carried a dagger in Florence, walked through the terraced gardens of the ancient city of Peru which lay hidden from our knowledge till a year or two ago, and ate "long pig" in the Polynesian Edens.

Bob had fought in an airship. He had soared at fearful speed thousands of feet above ground; he had turned titanic somersaults in the blue, and hurdled clouds. He had talked, as he flew, with people on earth by wireless telephone. And once he had gone down beneath the sea in a submarine. He had made battle with strange weapons in the biggest war on record. And yet when he went about his daily chores he was altered not one whit in appetite, desire, character, or ambition. His love could still be expressed in the words of "the song of songs, which is Solomon's":

"My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bore her. . . . Who is she that looketh fresh as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners? . . . Return, return, O Shulamite."

And April Summerlin, the modernest of modern girls, who could drive a 1919 chariot at fifty miles or more an hour, who went abroad unveiled, unskirted, and unguarded, could still tell how, like the Shulamite, she wandered the city till she found her lover:

"I held him and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house. . . . Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."

Love like that has blazed like that since man was. It still glows with undiminished flame.

Stories like Bob's and April's are to be found in the ancientest papyri of Egypt, baked in thousands of brick pages in the long-concealed literature and life of Babylon and Assyria, handed down by word of mouth in the unwritten literature of all the tribes.

We are still thrilling with the same springs, harvesting the same crops, shuddering with the same blasts. Our loves, our marriages, our children are what theirs were, pink and intolerably beautiful as next spring's cherry blooms. Our hates, our partings, our deaths are as cruel as icy winds on lone midnights.

In Henry Blossom's lyric the refrain was, "I want what I want when I want it." It is the old, old refrain. We cannot want what others want us to want when they want us to want it. We cannot want what we already have, since we have it already. The many cannot help wanting what there are few of, and it is inevitable that the majority shall be disappointed. The things we want change forever, but the habit of wanting what we cannot get abides always.

The latest book that can be bought to-day by the most cautious and learned scholar in that field says that man has lived on this earth just about as he is now physically and mentally for at least a million years.

In all that time he has not learned to prevent or cure a common cold or an unwise love or an unintelligent marriage. He has found no theology that satisfies him. There is still no one religion that is even formally accepted by even a third of the people of the world.

The Christian nations, having just finished fighting among themselves the bloodiest, fiercest war of all time, cannot agree among themselves upon the terms of peace or upon the terms of their own creed; and nothing has recently more

aroused the animosity of sect for sect than a brief project to unite them all upon some few terms of agreement.

When the actors made a determined effort to build up a fund for the relief of their aged and unfortunate many clergymen lent their help, but one man of the cloth in New York denounced the stage entire, and declared from his pulpit that God Himself had interfered to disturb one meeting by turning out the electric lights!

A Jewish manager, publishing his Christmas good greetings to all the world, wished this minister well and asked him if he could find God's hand only in the dark.

Thus God's name is still juggled and His procedures as little understood as when Cain slew Abel over a matter of burnt-offerings.

Yet charity is not dead. There are tolerant men among the fanatics. Scientists are again as free as in ancient Greece to find out what they can, and to publish it without fear, though here again there is eternal bafflement since every advance of knowledge merely enlarges the number of new mysteries and multiplies our wonder at the things we cannot know.

There are as many as ever who make of their ignorance a shelter and draw about them a shawl of warm indifference. They believe what they want to believe and thank no one for telling them that Santa Claus does not really go sleigh-riding over the roofs of the world.

In spite of what we think or think we think or think we know, apple-blossoms go on rioting in season. Some of them wither; some are torn off by rude winds or tarnished with frost or gnawed by worms; some give place to fruit, and that fruit has its own various destinies. The worm will spare a few exceptions and they will glow awhile because the worms are busy elsewhere. Yet some of these will never ripen or will be eaten by hogs or will rot upon the ground. And nevertheless many will remain to be shipped to far countries or to give their seeds to future apple-trees.

Worms, hogs, flowers, fruits, defeat, prosperity—all are defeated or prosper, as may be. And no one can say of this one or of that one, "This or that will be its destiny."

The single wisdom we may trust is this: that what has always happened will happen again. We may believe Epi-

metheus, not Prometheus, and rejoice grimly in the assurance that for him who can and will make a choice there are no more sorrows than joys, no more defeats than triumphs; that bravery and sympathy can mitigate evil and collect usury from good.

## CHAPTER IV

BOB and April sat a long while looking away from each other, but yearning together mightily. They were bound together and kept asunder by the same love.

Their mothers sat pitiful and hardly knew what to wish for, except foggily for happiness each for her own child; and they did not know whether that could be best secured by a marriage or a parting.

Something impelled them—a wise instinct—to leave the young people alone together for their own counsel.

Mrs. Summerlin beckoned Mrs. Taxter to follow her into a little room off the dining-room. She called it the library, for she kept the popular magazines there.

They discussed the perils of matrimony from the aftermath of experience instead of the more or less blissful ignorance of instinct.

Marriage is a necessity beyond human wisdom or control. It can be regulated a little, like breathing, which is also only partly voluntary; but Nature insists that any marriage is better than none, and she will not be denied.

She will not give a clue to her specific desires and keeps befuddling the experimenters. Some obey their parents and choose wisely and conform to all the conventions and succeed as prettily as any couple has a right to expect. Others equally docile are confounded by abject wreckage.

Some rely on what they call romance, defy parents, neighbors, and laws, and run away to happiness and find it. And others of equal courage or recklessness go absolutely to smash.

There is neither guidance nor comfort in the chronicles.

One thing alone is certain, that the one subject forbidden to be freely and fully discussed in the twentieth century, as in all the others, is the question of sex relations, the most important of all to the individual, the family, the race, the world.

The profoundest researches and the sanest conclusions ever made were probably those of Havelock Ellis, an Englishman whose books were not permitted publication in England, and were only allowed in America under such restriction that only physicians and lawyers could buy them.

They tell nothing that it could hurt anybody to know, and little that everybody does not find out, anyway, but they must not be read by the public, which is encouraged to read every form of occult mischief and poisonous mysticism that anybody cares to print.

Havelock Ellis wrote an article for a popular magazine on the "New Husband." He pointed out that the venerable problems of marriage had been complicated by the war of wars. The emancipation of woman, having removed her from the curse of parasitism, left the man a parasite on her, since her hours must still be governed by his, though she must readjust her household hours to her out-of-household activities.

Bob and April exemplified the new riddle perfectly. She had for a year or more gone where she pleased in such costume as she pleased at such hours as she pleased. She had selected a career for herself. She would neither cook for him nor mend his clothes nor obey him.

He had lived for a year or more a womanless life in an army of men. He had learned to cook his own food, to mend and wash his own clothes, to make his own bed, and to dwell wherever the army pitched its camp.

How could they adjust themselves to the old-fashioned harness? It looks to be a puzzle with no solution. It is. But then it always has been.

Pick any place or period of the world's life and study the marital estate from its own documents and you will find just about the same domestic average made up of just about the same terms of plus and minus fidelity, purity, fecundity, and felicity.

Nearly everybody would deny this with heat, but anger does not alter the truth and the facts go on like clockwork whether they are ignored, distorted, or denounced.

This was both the danger and the comfort of the problem before Bob and April. They were bound to marry somebody and take a gamble with fate. If they married each other,

by any ceremony soever, or on any terms soever, the gamble still remained.

And the gamble included not only their own good and bad qualities, but the accidents of life, of health, of war and peace, temptation and opportunity.

Mrs. Taxter loved April Summerlin and Mrs. Summerlin loved Bob Taxter. Both old women knew an appalling amount of the terrors of love and matrimony. They had kept their hearts sweet through all their experience, because they chanced to be bees and not wasps and to distil more honey than venom from the juices of life that they sipped.

So now they fretted nobly over the future of their children, wisely believing that it would mimic their own pasts.

They had come to the point where their children were no longer their own and that was ache enough. But their children loved each other and were not perfect either in themselves or in their loves, and there was the rub.

While the white heads nodded and shook as they told over the faults and the beauties of their children's souls, and helplessly wondered what the outcome would be, the young folk sat equally dazed before the situation. The time had come to choose once for all, and they were not such fools that they could not see the perils of either choice. Each loved the other well enough to join or to sever their lives, each as the other thought best. But neither could say the fatal word.

## CHAPTER V

BOB could say none of the things he wanted to say, and the silence irked him. To dispel it, and to advertise at least one respect in which he had not failed ruinously, he grunted:

"Well, there's one bet I didn't lose, anyway?"

"Yes?" said April, with a tang of amused patronage.

"Yes. When I was coming up the Bay in the transport that brought us home I was all excited about oil, and Jimmy Dryden said I'd lose all my money in it, and I bet him I wouldn't. We bet our war crosses on it. 'Cross against cross,' I said. Well, neither of us won, for I didn't put my money in oil at all. Not that I didn't try to. I lost everything else—my self-respect, and your respect and your—whatever you ever felt about me. But I didn't lose my war cross. I'm glad I saved something."

April felt that there were many wonderful things to be said, but she could not think just what they were. Usually when she did not know the right thing to say she said something, anyhow—usually the wrong thing. She was afraid of herself now and very tired with all her soul and body had gone through. She basked in peace.

Bob felt a stir of love in him like the boiling within a volcano, hot, sulphurous, choking, but unable to utter itself.

He was the more hesitant to ask April to marry him because he felt sure that April would yield herself to his need of her.

With her, his silence pleaded more eagerly for him than any other eloquence could have done. His self-depreciation ennobled him in her eyes. Meekness is glorious in a lover.

She had the seeds of motherhood in her, and all their urge. She had exercised that spirit on her first dolls. Her lovers were her later dolls. She was done with them all and wanted to keep only one, her husband doll. And his name was Bob. Yet she was in no great hurry to cry the banns.

Oldsters up-stairs often wonder how on earth two young lovers can endure each other for so long, in silent communion

and observation. They have forgotten the huge philosophies that must be mused upon, the infinite considerations that must be pondered.

But while April pondered Bob, he pondered his own shortcomings and far-goings. He grew miserabler and miserabler, and sank deeper and deeper into the mire of his love. Yet April's dream upon him grew richer and tenderer, bridalwise, mothersome. As Whittier said of Amy Wentworth singing, "The smile upon her parted lips was sweeter than the song."

April had been released from the maidenly and ladylike restraints of yesteryear. Since she could vote, why should she not propose? It was evident that if any proposing were to be done, she would have to do it.

"Well, Bob," she murmured at last.

"Well, April," he sighed.

"Haven't you got anything to say?"

"Tons! But what's the use? You know what I've done. You'll never forgive it or forget it, and I can't ask you to."

"You don't have to. You haven't done me any harm yet and I've forgotten already everything that has happened."

Bob's pride was never so intractable as when he was wrestling in the dust with it.

"I don't want you to marry me out of pity or to reform me, you know," he grumbled.

April laughed aloud. "I haven't the faintest idea of attempting the impossible by trying to reform you. And as for pity—I'd as soon pity one of those royal Bengal tigers in the Zoo."

He nearly smiled at this. But he said nothing.

Again she spoke in a bewildering mingling of whimsical raillery and divine desire:

"Do you want me to make all the love?"

He tossed about in agony but he did not speak.

Then she placed herself alongside him, picked up one of his hands, drew it resolutely around her waist, and lifted her mouth like a fragrant and vocal rose, whispering:

"For Heaven's sake, kiss me!"

And he did—for Heaven's sake; and found a heaven there. He almost destroyed his mate with the fierce constriction of his arms.

The two anxious mothers, frantic with suspense, appeared on the horizon just in time to witness the welding. They fell straightway into each other's arms and began to weep with all their might.

They had got their hearts' desire, and that, if ever, is the time to weep.

For decency's sake, they ran out of the room; but they could not stifle their clamor.

Zeb and Pansy heard it and hobbled out of the kitchen in alarm.

Questions and answers apprised them of the situation in the studio.

Zeb tiptoed to the door and peeked in at the love-birds, who had returned impatiently and insatiably to their billing and cooing after the disturbers had vanished.

Zeb knew better than to frighten them apart by his laughter as he had done once before. He slipped secretly away, and confronted the two old women in the library.

From his far greater age he looked down upon the two old mothers as children still. He guessed at once the cause of their dismay, and with a childlike rashness ventured into prophecy.

What Bob and April would do with their lives and their wealth was still unwritten in the books of time. Whether they should invest their money profitably or lose it all or part nobody could say. Whether they should set up housekeeping in older-fashioned ways or inhabit one of Mr. Kellogg's community palaces, where everything was done for them, what difference would it make?

Newspapers yet unprinted would have to tell whether they committed divorce or other crimes or good works startling enough for the front page or the minor blazonry of the inner regions.

Distant columns of births and deaths and marriages would have to declare whether they had children or not, and how many, and how and when and where they lost them.

The long and stormy courtship was but the prologue to the real play, and we cannot stay even for the first curtain to rise, or print its undetermined scenes and dialogues here.

But Zeb could prophesy, and his guess forward was as good as anybody's else could be.

He began by railing at his young mistresses. He had recovered from his uncomfortable liberty with a vengeance. He had taken on not only a master, but mistresses—April, her mother, her mother-in-law, and their tyrant-slave, Pansy.

"What you chillun cryin' abote now?" he demanded of the tremulous ladies. "You don't need to tell me. I know! You'm frettin' ova them two doves in thah beca'se they's happy for once, and you'm afeard it won't last forevva.

"What ef it don't? Pansy's been tellin' me them two young-uns has fit each otha evva sence they could reach ote of they cradles. She thinks they'll go right on fightin'. Well, what ef they do? It seems to agree with 'em mighty well, looks like to me.

"But ma notion is that they is jest abote fitten ote. Seems to me they been quawlin' because they wasn't togetha. They been lonelyin' for one anotha all this long time and ragin' beca'se they had to wait so long for to be j'ined togetha in the same hahness.

"Miss April done went around by her lonesome and win the waw on this side the ocean; Masta Bob done smash them Jummans to pieces on th' otha side.

"They got so used to fightin' they nachelly had to fight each otha. Masta Bob nearly got linked up with that Texas trash, but he wouldn't 'a' lived with her for ten minutes.

"The Lawd sent me around to perteck ma own. I got my masta divo'ced in advance of gettin' ma'ied. And that's the best time.

"And now ef you could see them two settin' thah hangin' on tew each otha like I seen 'em, you'd know they troubles is ova. They done finished they share of fightin' and the rest is happiness.

"Does you 'memba, Miss Lee—no, you don't; you wasn't bawn that fur back. But yo' pappy had a pair of colts that matched so perfeck they jest had to be trained to double hahness. And I was what trained 'em.

"They was no tellin' which was goin' to get broke fust, them or me. When they wasn't fightin' me they fit each otha. They'd bite and kick and squeal and rar up and bolt, jump fences, and kick down stalls. They just wouldn't stand bit, saddle, or bridle for the longest time evva you see.

"But by 'n' by they begun to change. Little ba little they begun to like the track and the check-rein and the traces. And one day I hitched 'em up alongside and tried 'em out round the place. Then I hollered, 'Open the gate and leave us ote in the main road.' And away we went.

"Oh, Missy Lee and Miz Summalin, they was nevva no team went like them two! I can see 'em now tossin' they heads, and nibblin' one anotha playful, and patterin' away down the road makin' music with they foots.

"Ef you'd 'a' hitched up two tuttle-doves with silk ribbons they couldn't 'a' flew no sweeta.

"They was travelin' mighty true togetha when I got foolish in the haid and run off.

"But now I's come home and I ain't goin' to see us Taxtas die out whilst Miss April is handy and willin'.

"Them two is hankerin' atter double hahness and the road lays befo' 'em as pritty as pritty and as straight as straight. You leave them two honeys to old Uncle Zeb. I'll be 'sponsible. I won't live forevva, I don't s'pose, but I got a long while comin' to me yet, and I'm tellin' you-all we-all is jest goin' to commence to begin to live."

THE END

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